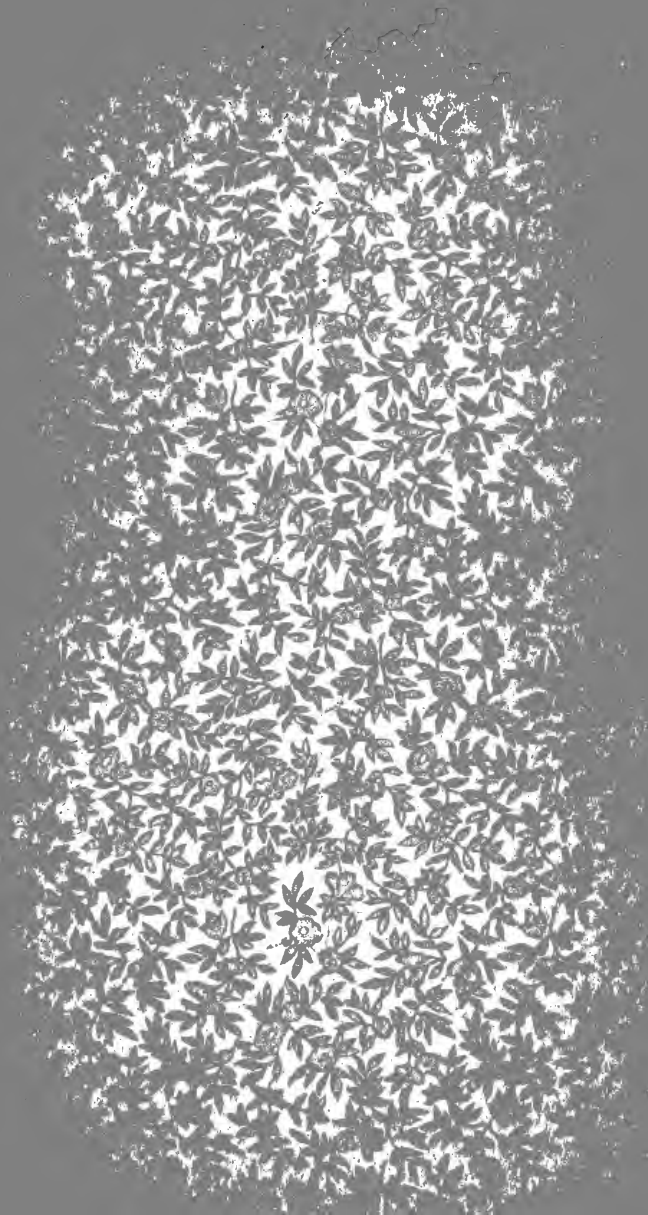
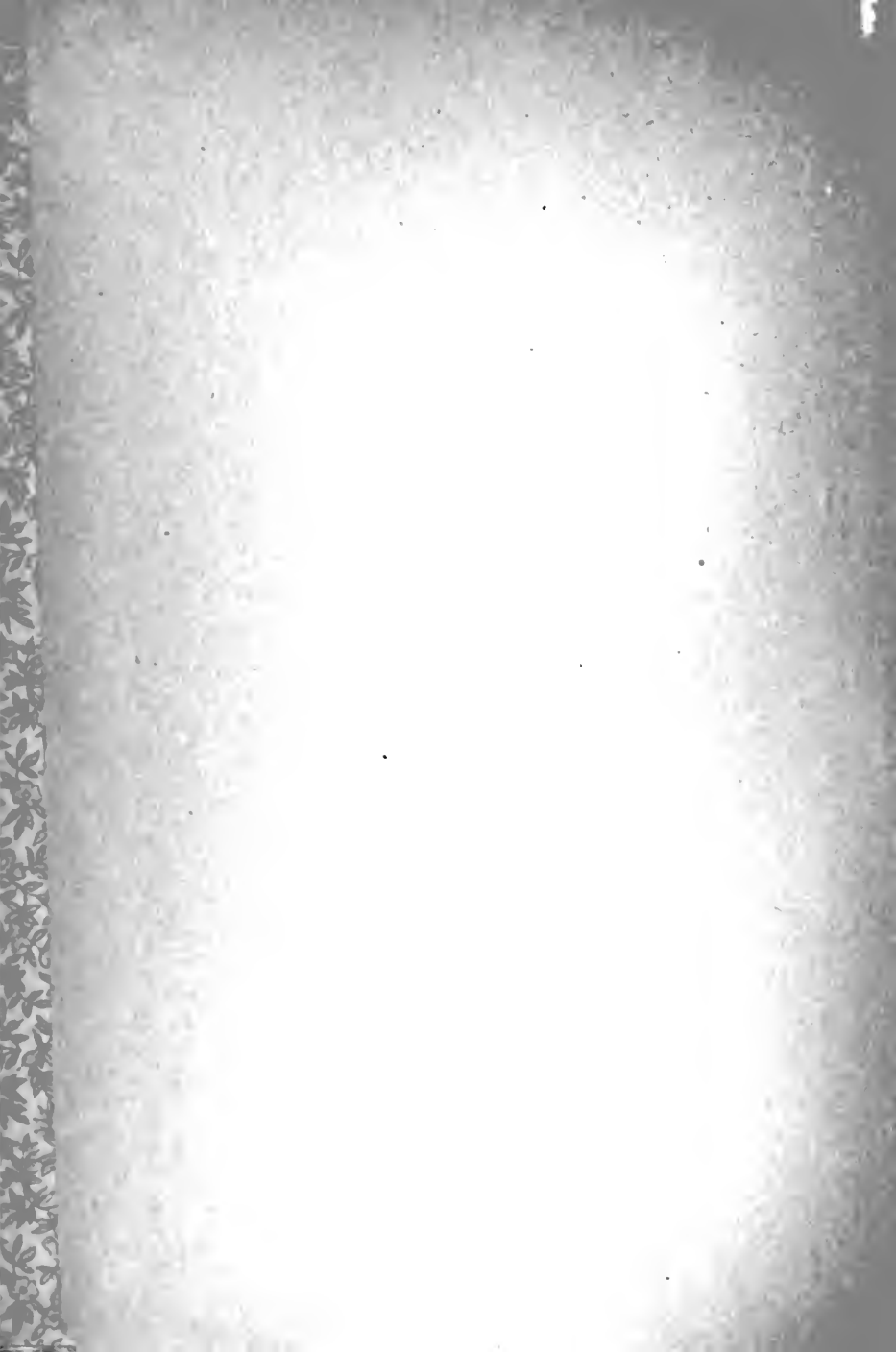






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[See page 247.]

TOM HERON OF SAX

A STORY OF THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL OF
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN

Author of "Old Miss Audrey," "Namesakes," "The Head of the House," etc.



FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

NEW YORK

CHICAGO

TORONTO

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY, LONDON

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TOM HERON OF SAX

CHAPTER I.

A YORKSHIRE VILLAGE.

‘GOOD EVEN, Tom. Busy as usual? Is that thy last job?’

Tap, tap, tap, went the young blacksmith's hammer, driving the long nails with faultless precision into the hind foot of the nag which he was holding between his knees. He glanced up sideways at his questioner, and said,—

‘Even, Luke. Thee canst wait till I've done, if thee hast anything to say. Whoa, lad! Steady; so, boy, so!’

Luke Crowder leaned negligently against the wall of the open shed which adjoined the smithy, where the shoeing of the horses was done, and watched Tom's quick, accurate movements with a certain sense of admiration. He himself was a loose-limbed, awkwardly made man, and he betrayed by the uncertain movements of his hands, by the redness of his eyes, and the general ‘flabbiness’ of his physical condition, the fact of a long and intimate acquaintance with the contents of his father's cellar. His excuse for his well-known habits of intemperance was, that since his father kept the Red Dragon there was no getting out of drinking with the guests—common sociability demanded as much from him. Certainly, if that were so, no one could deny that he did his duty nobly, and sacrificed himself to the courtesies of life

with the greatest good-will. He had the reputation in Sax of being the greatest ne'er-do-well in the place—with only one exception—and that exception was Tom Heron. He held the undisputed claim to being the blackest of all the black sheep within a radius of ten miles at least; and there were members of the community who distinctly prided themselves upon the notorious lawlessness and recklessness of the young blacksmith, feeling that it conveyed a species of distinction upon his native place.

Not that hard drinking was Tom's special vice. He was, to be sure, a constant visitor at the Red Dragon; but his head was as hard as the muscles of his arms, and he could stand a 'night of it' without 'turning a hair.' But he was not especially fond of strong liquor. If he had been, he would most likely have found himself in the same state as Luke, for he earned good wages with his uncle, and had never yet been known to deny himself, from a sense of principle, any indulgence he craved. His companions proudly said of him in their moments of expansion, that he 'feared not God, neither regarded man.'

The horse was shod. The lad in attendance led him away, and Tom, who had gathered up his tools, lifted up himself and faced the patient Luke. In so doing he revealed a very handsome and rather striking face, which lacked many of the characteristics usually seen in the rustic type of countenance common in Sax.

There was nothing vacant, bovine, or placid in the marked features and striking countenance of the young blacksmith. His hair, which was remarkably thick, clustered in close curls round his finely shaped head, whilst from beneath overhanging brows, emphasised by thick, dark fringes, a pair of luminous eyes looked forth defiance upon the world, flashing, kindling, changing with every gust of passion or feeling; often enchaining the attention of the beholder at a first glance, such power, restlessness, and wildness was expressed in that gaze. The nose, with its widely dilated

nostrils, was the only other feature in that remarkable face which seemed in keeping with the eyes. Passion and susceptibility to emotion were written there, but seemed to be contradicted by the excessive squareness and immobility of the mouth and jaw, and by the deep, upright lines in the brow, indicative of the dark scowl which came only too readily to the face, and was one of its most constant expressions. To look at that face in many of its moods would be to receive absolute conviction that this man was as stubborn and immovable as the rock itself. The eyes spoke of changing gusts of passion, the quivering nostrils of susceptibility to outward impression; but those straight compressed lips—that jaw, which looked as if moulded by his own strong hands upon his own anvil—it might well perplex any one to find a way of winning an influence upon the owner of such a mouth as that. Moreover, the young smith stood six-foot-three in his stockings, and had a way of simply knocking down and leaving half dead any person rash enough to try and interpose between him and his wild ways.

As he raised himself from his stooping position and faced Luke with a question in his eyes, he looked a very Goliath of Gath before the shrunken figure of the publican's son. Again a glance as of envy lighted up the flushed face of the toper, and he drew a long breath as he said,—

‘Eh, but what a man thee be, Tom! I’d give a deal to be like thee.’

‘Thee didn’t come here to say that, I take it, Luke,’ was the rather scornful answer. ‘What’s thee got to say to-night?’

‘Well, I thought as I’d look in, as I had naught to do. I say, Tom lad, beest thee going to the preaching on Sunday?’

‘Preaching?’ echoed Tom scornfully. ‘Thee be surely a fool, Luke Crowder! What have the likes of us to do with preachings and parsons—eh?’

'Nay, nay, I don't mean the preachings in the church. Thee must have heerd tell of the Methodys, as folks call them, Tom—them as preaches in the fields and places, and sends folks ravin' mad?'

Tom shrugged his broad shoulders and scowled in impatient disgust.

'I know naught about such things,' he said; 'I leave all that to women and fools. Thee be half a fool theeself, Luke, if thee listens to such old wives' tales.'

Luke did not take offence at such plain speaking. Tom was privileged to say what he would.

'Well, that's true enow; only women and fools would care a straw what any fool of a preacher said. But folks say it's a mighty fine sight to see and to hear them, and there's to be preaching on Sunday at Hownston—at the market cross.'

'And thee's wanting to go, I suppose,' sneered Tom. 'Thee be a proper fool, Luke Crowder.'

'Folks go who beant no more fools than thee, Tom,' answered Luke, nodding his head. 'There be fine times at some of them preachings. They shy stones and rotten eggs, and set on the preacher and drag him round the town, or duck un in the horse-pond. It be rare sport, they say, to bait the preacher and send his flock flying. I thought if thee and me and some of our boys were to go——'

Luke stopped suddenly, for he saw that another listener had approached, of whose close proximity he had not been hitherto aware. Tom's eyes had given one responsive flash, although he had not spoken again; and now neither of the young men attempted to do so, for old Samson Heron, the senior blacksmith of Sax, was the one being in the place of whom the black sheep had the grace to stand in some awe. He was a very fine-looking old man, with hair as white as snow, although he carried his seventy years so well that, save for his bleached locks, he would have passed for a much younger man. He had something the same

physique as his nephew Tom; but here the resemblance ceased, for his eyes were a bright, clear blue, his skin was fair and ruddy in tone, and his features were rugged and kindly in expression, though not lacking in quiet firmness. He wore the leathern apron of his calling, like Tom, and his hammer was still in his hand as he stood upon the threshold of the shed.

‘Ay, lads, if ye and some of your comrades were to go, ye could show the messenger of the King of kings how nobly and bravely and courageously the boys of Sax can show themselves; how they can set by the dozen upon one harmless, inoffensive, unresisting man, and drag him round the town, beating and pelting him, to show their own courage and manliness and worthiness. Go, Luke Crowder, and do it; it would be another feather in that cap of thine, it would be like thee and like thy other works.’

‘Come, come, Master Samson, thee need’st not turn on me like that,’ answered Luke, interrupting half angrily, half sullenly; ‘there be better men nor me who say these preachers are wicked disturbers of the peace—Jacobites and papists in disguise—and I know not what besides—’

‘If thou knowest not, hold thy peace, thou prating fool!’ was the stern reply of the old man—rendered all the more stern because that Luke was plentifully interlarding his speech with oaths, as was the regular custom of those days amongst almost all classes of people. Samson Heron, however, was one of those who never swore himself, and did all in his power to check the growth of the sinful habit in those around him. Even Tom was a little more guarded in his speech in presence of his uncle, though at other times he was as foul in his language as any man in the county.

But Luke did not relish being taken up quite so sharply and he began again, still in the same injured way,—

‘Well, Master Samson, I didn’t think it of thee—taking up arms for these beggarly preachers—a good churchman like thee. Why, if they have told thee aught about it, they

must have told thee that the parsons hate these preachers worse nor anybody else, leading away good sober folk from church, and turning them stark-raving mad, that nobody can do aught with them no more. I know a deal more than thee canst, for all the travellers come to the Red Dragon, and they are all full of these strange goings-on, and what the parsons say to them. If thee be a good churchman, thee cannot uphold these preachers. So what'll thee decide betwixt them, Master Samson?' and Luke, who evidently thought he had got his enemy into a corner, put on a swaggering air and looked him full in the face.

The old man returned the gaze very quietly.

'Thou art an ignorant loon, Luke Crowder,' he said. 'Thou hearest the idle gossip of thy half-drunken comrades, and thou thinkest thou hast heard a new gospel. I know better than thee, lad. These men who are preaching here and there all over the country are clergymen—the great ones amongst them—of the Church of the land. What they preach is doctrine which may be found in our Prayer Book and in our Bibles. If they fall into error from excess of zeal—as I say not that they may—have not better men than they done the same? "He that is not against us is with us"—is it for us to fight against the Lord?'

'But, Master Samson, the parsons themselves are loudest in their complaints. It is they who lead the riots again and again. It is they who say these men teach false doctrine.'

'Cease, lad—cease thy ignorant prating. There be parsons who welcome them gladly, and give to them the right hand of fellowship. Why, it was but two days since that I was talking with our own Mr. Latham on this very point. He is no foe to these preachers. He says they be true Christians, ay, and true churchmen likewise, and that they may well be instruments used by the great God of heaven for the awakening of His sleeping Church.'

'Mr. Latham—Mr. Latham, indeed!' sneered Luke in profound contempt, for Mr. Latham was merely the poor

curate who resided in the village of Sax, the rector, who held several better livings, being resident in the town of Hownston, ten miles away. 'What does Mr. Latham know? If madam hears that he teaches folks such dangerous doctrine, she will soon send him packing. Ask the rector what he thinks; ask the squire. Thee be a fine speaker, Master Samson, and thee has fine ideas in that head of thine, but thee doesn't know everything yet; and thee'd best be careful how thee takes up with these new preachings and doctrines, or thee may chance to find theeself in the wrong box. Folks do say as madam will make the squire turn out of their cottage any folks who go to preachings and follow the Methodys.'

Argument was not Luke's forte, and he stood in considerable awe of the doctrinal capacities of the blacksmith, who was said to be a match even for the sexton, Glegg. The latter was generally reputed the wisest man in the place; but as Samson was himself a loyal churchman, and a faithful old tenant of the Fortescue family, there was little occasion for controversy, although there was a latent consciousness in the mind of the people that the two men looked upon matters from very different standpoints.

Sax was one of those villages, common enough in old days, that exists entirely, as it were, in the shadow of the great house of the place, ruled and dominated by the wills of the heads of that family, and practically dependent upon them for everything. Life may flow peacefully enough there in the main; justice, kindness, and good-will may for the most part be exercised to all alike; but let friction come, let some unlucky wight contrive either by misadventure or carelessness or evil practices once thoroughly to offend the autocrats of the place, and then woe betide him! There is no appeal to a higher jurisdiction; there is small hope from public opinion. He may retain a few private friends, but the majority will side with the 'great folks,' and the luckless offender will be a practical outcast from his kind. The power

thus practically vested in a single family is rather a terrible thing, and it behoves those who wield it to look warily where they tread, or they may have more to answer for when the books are opened and the secrets of all hearts and lives made known, than in their careless days of autocratic power they have ever dreamed.

In Sax the ruling power was vested in the Fortescue family. Squire Fortescue lived in the great quadrangular house, standing well back in its finely timbered park; and 'Madam,' as his wife was always called, was said to be something of an autocrat at home, and was an object of veneration and awe to all the inhabitants of the village.

Rector Fortescue resided in Hownston, and kept a poor curate to do the duty in the little old church of Sax. Owing to his close kinship with the squire, the rector was very well known in Sax, but not as a pastor of his flock. He would have considered it out of place to visit any of them in an official capacity. He knew the names of most of the people, and would exchange a cheery word with them as he rode down the village street. His son, the 'Captain,' as the people liked to call him, was greatly admired in Sax for his dashing bearing and military ways. He was often over, too, for he and his cousin Fulk (the heir of the Fortescue family) were great friends, and were constantly together whenever the captain was home on leave. The latter had but just returned from the war, and having seen active service abroad, and fought in the battle of Dettingen, was accounted a hero in the eyes of the people and admired more than ever.

Sax was a small place lying in the midst of a picturesque country some twenty miles to the north-west of York. The traveller from York approaching the village would first become aware that he was reaching inhabited country by finding that the left-hand side of the road was paled in, and had changed its character from moorland to an expanse of fine park. From time to time he would get glimpses of the pile of red brick building of which Rookwood was composed, and

presently he would reach the first outlying cottages of Sax. A wooded lane branching off to the right led, as he might discover upon inquiry, to Ernscliff—Ernscliff itself being an old-fashioned house occupying the ground enclosed by a horse-shoe bend of the river Erne, with a little hamlet nestling round its gates,—and a farther branch of the wooded road, bending still more to the right, led to Farmer Dawson's farm of Sheepwold, of which more anon.

But if the traveller made no deflection from the main road, he would find himself speedily in Sax itself; and the first cottages, all on the right-hand side of the road, were those inhabited by Tom Heron and his mother, and by his uncle Samson, who dwelt next door, though not under the same roof. The forge and its sheds were only a few yards higher up the road, and then came the picturesque three-arched bridge crossing the river Erne. From the bridge an excellent view of the whole place could be obtained, for the road was wide and straight, and rose slightly in a gentle slope. On the right lay the village street, if such a name could be rightly applied to the irregular row of cottages and buildings which composed the village of Sax. The Red Dragon, with its swinging signboard, was just across the bridge, and then came a row of small thatched cottages, inhabited by the labourers who worked for the squire. Next the village shop stood out as a building of somewhat greater importance, and then came more cottages, and beyond that the village green, where the young men wrestled and played games on summer evenings, or occasionally a bull was baited—generally on Sunday—to the great delight of the majority of the community. Behind the cottages lay a thick belt of woodland, and the hill behind was also thickly wooded, so that no glimpse from Sax could be obtained of Ernscliff, though the place lay not more than a mile away as the crow flies.

To the left of the stranger, standing on the bridge, was still the park belonging to Rookwood, save that close against the road a portion of the park-land had been enclosed for

church and churchyard; and the small, quaint, cruciform building clothed in ivy seemed to overlook the village opposite, the boundaries of the churchyard being on one side the road, on another the river, on the third the magnificent avenue of lime trees leading up to the house, and on the fourth a fence, through which there was a private way of entrance for the 'family' to the church, the north transept of which was given up entirely for their use, and fitted up with stove and easy chairs almost like a room.

The river was artificially widened as it ran through the park into a succession of fine fish-ponds. The squire preserved his game most carefully, and was the master of the hounds for the neighbourhood. On the whole, the squire was a very popular man with his tenants (and there was no person in Sax who was not a tenant); and the heir was popular too. Of the second son, Hugh, less was known, as his life had been spent at school and at Oxford, and men did not come home in those days for vacations in the easy way they do now. Irene, the only daughter, was well liked, though little was seen of her in the place. Her health was delicate, and 'Madam' kept a firm hand over her. The emancipation and independence of young womanhood was a thing not so much as dreamed of then.

When Luke Crowder beat a retreat before the argumentative turn given to the conversation by Samson, and lounged across the bridge and in at his father's doors, Tom stood for a moment looking after him, as if he were half disposed to follow; but he saw that his uncle's eye was upon him, and he turned rather impatiently away, flinging down his tools in hasty fashion, as he strode off to his own home.

The picturesque exterior of the low thatched cottages, with their growth of flowering creeper, was not much in harmony with the dark dampness of the interior, which had neither beauty nor comfort to recommend it. Tom's home had little of the home element in it. Although he earned good wages as things went in those days, he lived in the midst of

squalor and discomfort. The cause was not far to seek. Tom's mother—by birth half a gipsy, from whom he had inherited his swarthy skin, dark eyes, and chiselled features—was a terribly wild and bad woman. During the lifetime of her husband, Tom's father, who had married her out of love, and had loved her faithfully to the end, she kept fairly straight; but on his death she broke out into the wildest ways, and finally deserted her little boy, and disappeared from Sax. Samson took the boy and brought him up. He was himself a childless widower, and was glad enough to have the boy, despite the fact that he early showed signs of having inherited much of the wild nature of his mother. Tom lived with him until he was twenty—two years from the date at which this story begins—and then, after an absence of many long years, Jenny Heron suddenly returned to Sax, and brought with her a blind child—a little girl—her own daughter, but a child of whose father she never spoke.

She came to Tom, and demanded a home with him; and he gave it her. He had lately rented for himself the empty cottage next his uncle, for he and Samson did not entirely assimilate in their ways, as may well be guessed. Wild, reckless, dare-devil as he was, Tom would not turn his mother from the door, even though she brought to him nothing but shame and degradation. All the difference it appeared to make in him was that he became more and more reckless—drinking, swearing, fighting—always in the thick of any cock-fighting, bull-baiting, or other savage sport. He kept his mother supplied with money enough to give her ample opportunities to drink herself into frenzy, and only smiled a bitter smile as he saw her in her degradation, and found his home made more squalid and dismal than any other house in the place.

And yet in the midst of all this misery and humiliation there was one bright spot in the life of this young blacksmith—one soft spot in his hard and reckless heart. There were

those amongst his boon companions who would have seen with astonishment the change that came over his dark face when he stepped down into the low-raftered room of his dismal cottage, and heard a little voice hailing him out of the darkness,—

‘Oh, Tom, Tom, is that thee? Oh, I am so glad! I have got supper all ready for thee—for mother is out—and we will have it so cosily together in the kitchen here.’

Tom stepped through the door, tossed the little blind child in his arms, and let her put her arms about his neck and kiss him, since there was nobody there to see him; for the love of that little sightless child, without father, without name, was the one influence in Tom Heron’s life that kept alive within him the spark of the Divine nature in man—the love which is the name of God.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT FOLKS OF SAX.

THE far-back Fortescue who had built Rookwood had certainly understood the advantage of aspect. The main living-rooms in the big pile of building all faced due south, and the lower windows opened upon a wide terrace (always flooded by sunshine), terminated by a wide stone balustrade, broken at intervals by flights of shallow steps, which led down to the gardens beneath, and commanded an excellent view over fish-ponds and park.

The great dining-room was situated in the east angle of the south front, and had a large window to the east, so that no brighter place could well be found upon a summer's morning; and as the Fortescue family sat together at their late breakfast this sunny day in April, the whole of the handsome apartment was flooded with golden light, the shadows being even dislodged from the high vaulted ceiling, where they gathered and lingered as the day went on.

Squire Fortescue was dressed for riding, high boots and tight-fitting breeches taking the place of the long silk stockings and low shoes worn for the most part at other times. He was a very fine-looking man, in the prime of middle-aged manhood, with the square-cut, but handsome and regular Fortescue features, a rubicund face, and an expression of jovial good-humour, only slightly tinged with the imperiousness which was plainly visible in the countenance of his wife, and was said to belong in no scant measure to the whole of

the Fortescue family. He wore the flowing wig, which was still almost universal, and the long, wide-skirted coat of the period. But his dress was plain and workmanlike, and a decided contrast to that of his son, who wore a long, richly embroidered waistcoat, a laced coat of tawny golden cloth, with the whitest of white ruffles at the wrists, and a mass of snowy pleats in the front. This young exquisite had also adopted a newer fashion of hairdressing, such as may be seen in Hogarth's drawings of the day. The wig consisted of a bushy heap of well-powdered hair in front and at the sides, whilst behind it was plaited into a tail, tied top and bottom with a black ribbon. Yet notwithstanding the care and elegance with which Fulk Fortescue attired himself, he was a manly young fellow to look at, one of the boldest riders and best shots in the country, though he had combined with his father's sporting tastes much of the imperious grace and autocratic temper of his mother.

Madam having finished her delicate breakfast, was now leaning back in her chair, idly toying with a feather fan. She was still a very lovely woman—it was hard to believe her the mother of that tall son. Her complexion retained all the exquisite bloom of girlhood, and was set off by the cunning little black patches she still wore, despite the change of fashion. Her abundant hair of pale gold was rolled up upon her head, and crowned by a small cap of the Mary Stuart shape; whilst her dress consisted of the loose *sacque*, flowing free from the shoulders, with a fitting under-robe and small hoop. Simplicity was all the rage of that day—ladies even at Court affecting the shepherdess style, and playing at Arcadia. It was perhaps the natural recoil from the over-elaboration of the former century, and certainly in the country the simple style of dress was both suitable and pleasing.

Irene, the only daughter of the Fortescue family, was a fragile-looking girl of eighteen, shrinking and modest, and very silent, though the expression of her face showed that

her silence was not the result either of apathy or ignorance. Hers, indeed, was the most intellectual of the faces round the table, and her dark eyes shone with a light that might have been akin to genius itself. She was dressed for the saddle, in the flowing riding-habit of the day, and a plumed hat and pair of gauntleted gloves lay with a whip upon a side-table. Riding was almost the only form of exercise in vogue for ladies in those days, and Irene gladly availed herself of the permission from time to time afforded her of accompanying her father upon his morning round.

The squire was just talking to his son of certain matters on the estate which he considered in want of personal supervision, when a stir in the hall without seemed to indicate the arrival of guests, and the next moment the door was thrown wide open to admit the rector and his son, the dashing young captain, in all the glory of military bravery, of which men were not then ashamed in private life.

‘Why, George!’ cried the squire, rising from his seat and giving a warm grip of the hand to his clerical brother, who was exceedingly like him in everything but dress, ‘what brings you here so early, man? Sit down, sit down, and have something to eat. You have ridden, I take it, from Hownston to-day? Is it business or pleasure that has brought you over?’

‘I came early lest I should find you gone,’ answered the rector, as, after saluting his sister-in-law and niece, he took a seat at the hospitable board, and commenced a second breakfast with excellent appetite. ‘I wished to consult you about a difficulty which we have now to face. I have feared it might come, yet hoped it might pass us by; but there is no such good fortune, it seems. The Methodists are coming to the town at last, and there is to be preaching in the market-place on Sunday.’

‘What! The mad Methodists?’ cried the squire, leaning back in his chair and laughing. ‘Well, George, let them rant and rave their fill, I should say. It won’t last long, and

people soon come to their senses when the madmen have gone on their way again.'

'That's all very well,' answered the rector; 'that's what I said to myself once, when I heard of these strange goings on in other places. I always thought it a pity to interfere; let the men come and go, I said, and they will be forgotten fast enough when their backs are turned; but since I have inquired a little more, I find it is not such a simple question as it seems, and I have had all the town authorities at me yesterday about it.'

'And what have they got to say?'

'Why, it seems that these men stir up riot and strife and tumult wherever they go. They set the authority of the law at open defiance. And then over and above that, they stir up divisions in families. They set children against parents, and parents against children; servants are encouraged to disobey their masters, and mere lads and children are taught to go about rebuking their elders, and setting themselves up as patterns. They claim to have attained to a sinless perfection, or some such exalted condition, and they begin to have some secret organisation amongst themselves; a system of espionage and confessional altogether foreign to the spirit of the nation.'

'Ah!' exclaimed madam in her silvery tones, that with all their sweetness were full of imperious resolution and command, 'I have said so all along, from the very first; it is all some vile popish plot. These men are in league with those wretched Jacobites; they are paving the way for another rebellion, such as has only just been quenched in blood on the field of Culloden. Under the guise of simple shepherds, they are in reality ravening wolves. George—as you have any regard for the Church or State—put down these meetings with an iron hand. Take any measures that may be necessary, but do not suffer the men to speak within the bounds of your parishes. They are guilty of both treason and sacrilege. Who are they, to set themselves up above

the clergy and the nobility of the land? Put them down with a high hand, I say. If ever they dare to set foot within the limits of my husband's estate, I will soon have them shown how Fortescues treat such miscreants !'

'Bravo, aunt !' cried the captain, with heartfelt approval ; 'that is just what I have all along said. Put them down and keep them down. They will do untold harm if they are allowed to go on at the present rate. I have seen something of them in the army ; they hold meetings, deny their followers meat and drink, teach them to spend their time in fasting and prayer, and in going about rebuking every one else not of their way of thinking. I have been dinning the same lesson all this while into my father's ears, but he is too much disposed not to interfere. Well, he must go his own way ; but we can go ours. Fulk, my boy, there are a few honest lads in Sax who would not be above a little Sunday diversion, I take it. I was thinking of the thews and sinews of that excellent Tom Heron as we rode along to-day. You and I, with a score of stout fellows of his class, would be able to make short work of any meeting in Hownston market-place. Eh ?'

Fulk's lips parted in a smile, and he gave an emphatic nod.

'It would be work after Tom Heron's own heart,' he said. 'With half a dozen such as he I would undertake to rout the whole mob and send them flying. Why does your father hesitate? They want a lesson, these ranters, and they shall get it.'

'I do not know what to think,' said the rector ; 'I am not fond of disturbances and riots, but if let alone these men will set the whole place by the ears. What I dislike and distrust even more than their teachings and preachings, is the extraordinary effect these have upon the listeners. The stories I have heard are scarce to be believed, save that I have them upon testimony which may not be doubted. One would almost believe that satanic agency was at work following in their steps, for those who hear them appear

to be suddenly possessed by the devil. They fall down like men struck by an unseen hand, and wallow on the ground, foaming in mortal agony. Men, women, and children are alike struck, sometimes by ones or twos, but more often by scores—at least when some of these men are preaching. For days sometimes these fits and agonies continue. The preachers profess to have power by praying over their victims to exorcise the evil spirit, and in some cases I believe they succeed; but frequently the poor wretches fall back into their former condition, and many have become permanently deranged. Others have fallen into a state of deepest melancholy and gloom, from which nothing can rouse them; whilst others rush to the other extreme, and become filled with a species of ecstatic rapture, declaring themselves to be freed from all sin, and henceforth to be beyond the power of falling into evil.'

'Horrible!' exclaimed madam, with a little shudder. 'I cannot imagine any form of teaching more revolting or blasphemous. George, I trust you will use every means possible for hindering the spread of this disease, for I can regard it as nothing else—the foul outcome of rebellion, popery, and defiance of all law and order. I hope your son and mine will both be ready to do their duty in stamping out the fatal sparks, before the flame can be kindled. Squire, I should wish it to be well understood in Sax, that any person going to these preachings, with any purpose but that of interfering to prevent their taking place, will at once cease to be a tenant of ours. No Methodist shall be permitted to dwell in Sax. We have evils enough to cope with without that.'

'The Methodists have not appeared yet, my dear,' answered the squire, as he rose from his seat. 'Well, George, if you will ride with me, we will talk this matter over together. Irene, you must be my companion another morning instead. Your uncle and I have business to talk over together to-day.'

Irene, who had not said a word all this time, although she had been listening with close attention to everything spoken, replied submissively to her father; and the captain, observing that she was in riding trim, suggested that they should go, together with Fulk, to pay their respects to the ladies of Ernscliff; a suggestion which appeared to give satisfaction to all. Irene's face brightened, and madam smiled as she said,—

‘Yes, that would be an excellent plan. And, Irene, my daughter, be sure you speak to Mary Ernscliff of the menaced danger to these parts, and bid her keep all her tenants at home on Sunday, that they be not attracted to Hownston. Mary is not always as firm as she should be; but she is a good girl, and tries, I believe, to do her duty. Put her upon her guard. A woman is so often taken advantage of by those under her.’

‘I will tell her everything I have heard,’ answered Irene; ‘I always like talking things over with Mary.’

Fulk quickly retired to make the necessary change in his dress, and was ready by the time the horses came round.

It was a beautiful morning for a ride, as the three cousins started forth from Rookwood, and cantered their horses over the soft turf of the park. The captain was very full of his plan of getting together a band of choice spirits to interrupt the proceedings of the ‘maniac’ on the coming Sunday, and Fulk was quite ready to enter into the spirit of the thing, which he regarded rather in the light of a jest. As they passed the village forge they saw Tom Heron at work inside, and called him out to speak to them. Tom was, in spite of his reputation for wildness, a great favourite with the young men of the Fortescue family. He was the best farrier for miles round, and clever with animals of all kinds. He was invaluable to them in many little ways where sport was concerned, and his fearlessness and recklessness had won him a decided reputation of his own. His face lighted as he obeyed the

summons of the gentlemen, and advanced, hammer in hand, to meet them. But Irene's face clouded over slightly. She felt sure she knew the purpose for which her companions wished to stop and converse with the young blacksmith, and with a whispered word to her brother she herself rode on, leaving them to finish their talk as they would.

She rode on along the main road, and then, turning sharply to the left up the wooded lane, cantered along in the pleasant flickering shade made by the early green of chestnut and sycamore for about a mile. Soon she found herself close beside the river banks, and saw before her, within the silver horse-shoe formed by the curious double bend of the shining stream, the wooded cone of rising ground, crowned by the twisted chimneys and many gables of the old house of Ernscliff. The road followed the outer bend of the river, and led straight to the house. It was plain that Irene was no stranger here, for she took the road to the stable-yard, instead of that to the house; and when a servant came forward to hold her horse, she dismounted, and walked to a small side door in the building, making her way unannounced into the presence of its inmates.

'The ladies of Ernscliff,' as they were frequently called, consisted of old Mrs. Ernscliff and her granddaughter Mary, the only child of her only son, who was the real owner of the property. Mrs. Ernscliff had lived in that house ever since she was twenty; Mary had been born there, and had never known any other home.

Irene plainly knew the ways of the house, and where its owner was to be found at this hour of the morning. Entering the fine old hall through a swing door from the passage she had followed from the offices, she crossed the slippery oak floor and opened a door, which admitted her into a bright little parlour, whose one occupant was a young lady, busily engaged in writing at a solid-looking table.

'Irene!' exclaimed a clear, low-toned voice, as the guest made her entrance; and the next minute Mary Ernscliff had

crossed the room and given a welcoming embrace to the intruder.

‘Am I interrupting, Mary? Are you busy?’

‘Not too busy to give you a welcome; but I always have plenty on my hands in the morning.’

‘Fulk and George are on their way,’ said Irene, sinking down into the one easy chair in the room into which Mary pushed her. ‘They are coming to pay their respects to you and Mrs. Ernscliff.’

Mary Ernscliff resumed her seat with a smile and a slight compression of the lips, as though this last piece of news was not altogether welcome. There was something rather remarkable in the appearance of this young land-owner and heiress (although from a money point of view she was by no means wealthy), and people when they saw her for the first time always put her down as a ‘woman with a history.’ That history is soon told. Left an orphan at the early age of sixteen, with a landed property to manage, subject only to the control of her grandmother till she was twenty-one, she had given herself over to her duties and her people, and had become graver and more thoughtful, as well as more independent, than women of her age and station generally were. At eighteen she had become betrothed to a distant kinsman living in the same county, to whom she was devotedly attached, and who seemed in every way the right husband for her. She was to have been married on her twentieth birthday. The preparations were complete, her happiness and welfare in life seemed fully assured, when just one week before the appointed wedding-day Francis Talbot was fatally injured by a fall from his horse in the hunting field, not two miles from Ernscliff, and was carried there to die, breathing his last an hour after he was brought beneath the roof of his affianced wife, with her hand clasped closely in his.

Before the grave closed over the earthly remains of her lover Mary Ernscliff’s beautiful brown hair had turned quite

white. It was this which gave something distinctive and peculiar to her appearance—the soft darkness of her eyes, with their pencilled brows of a silky blackness, the soft, youthful bloom of the face, upon which Time had scarce laid a hand, and the snowy whiteness of the wavy hair, whiter by far than that of her grandmother. Mary always dressed in grey, and with exceeding simplicity, and though three years had passed since the tragedy of her life, she had never gone out into the world, but lived entirely for her home and its dependants. Irene was her one intimate friend, and Rookwood the only house she cared to visit; though she occasionally accepted an invitation from the Fortescues of the Rectory at Hownston. Latterly, however, it had been growing plain to her that Captain Fortescue, whether from motives of policy or affection, was attempting to win his way to her especial grace. She was finding that the world declined to look upon her as one whose life was buried already in the grave, and that there were still experiences for her to pass through, which once she had told herself had closed to her for ever.

But her quiet calm of temperament and demeanour was not easy to ruffle or disturb. She made no comment upon Mary's piece of information, but listened with both interest and attention to her farther talk, which told of the discussion lately heard at the breakfast-table between the girl's kinsfolk, the intent and thoughtful look deepening upon her face as she did so.

'Mary, tell me what you think. What are these men, and ought they to be interfered with? I mislike a great deal that I hear of them. It seems to me to be a strange and irreverent thing to go about the country preaching in market-places, and at street corners, and in the fields, stirring up strife and riot and tumult in the name of religion. I would not go to such a preaching myself for any consideration. And if it be true that people fall down in fits and convulsions, as if possessed by the devil, it may scarce be wise to let it go on. And yet they *do* come in the name of God, and

some say they are good and holy men, and strive to save souls. If so, one fears to speak against them and their work, and it cannot be a right thing to raise a riot to drive them forth.'

'I was speaking but yesterday with Mr. Latham about this very thing,' answered Mary thoughtfully, 'and he told me many things I never knew before. He has been long watching the work of these Methodists, and he is one who would counsel men not to interfere. Irene, it seems that he was at Oxford with these men, Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield; and he tells me that they are sounder churchmen than many who hold benefices, and that the doctrine they teach is to be found not only in the Bible, but in the Prayer Book and the Canons of the Established Church. If men drive them not forth from that Church, they will never willingly go; and, albeit they take to open places and fields for their preachings, since pulpits have been denied them, they do but follow in that the example of Christ Himself, and we may not say that they do ill, even when we feel that it is strange and scarce seemly.'

Irene's eyes opened wide with surprise.

'Is Mr. Latham a Methodist? Oh, I hope mother will never know! I fear she would have him sent away; yet he is a good man, and we all love him and learn from him.'

Mary smiled slightly.

'I think, Irene, that the less we have to do with such names the better. Is it wise to revive again the old habit—"I am of Paul, I of Apollos"? Is it not enough that we are all of Christ? If these men preach any other but Christ, let us not hear them, let us warn all men against them; but if it be in His name they come, then let us not drive them forth from us, but hold out the right hand of fellowship, and look where we be agreed, smoothing away, if possible, all difficulties that lie in the way of perfect accord. Some day we know—some happy, blessed day—Christ will return to call His own, to make them one flock beneath one Shepherd.

Let it be our work, in as far as lies in our power, to smooth and prepare His way, loving all those who love Him, and calling them brothers, not foes.'

Irene's face lighted up with a glow of happiness.

'Oh, Mary,' she said, 'if only every one would speak and think as you do. But they will not, I know they will not, and then——'

But she could not finish her sentence; the door was thrown open by a servant, and Captain Fortescue and his cousin stepped in, bowing low to the mistress of Ernscliff.

CHAPTER III.

AN INTERRUPTED PREACHING.

THE market-place of Hownston presented an animated spectacle, for it was Sunday afternoon, and the hour was drawing near when the expected preaching was to take place, and it seemed as if the whole town had gathered together to be present at the unwonted exhibition.

The town of Hownston possessed a divided population, half agricultural and half collier. Of late years there had been some coal-pits opened in the neighbourhood, and since that time a separate population had grown up around them which differed greatly from the rustic people who had hitherto dwelt in and around the town. The colliers were a ruder, rougher, more energetic race, and it was among them that the work of the Methodist revivalists had commenced. Ignorant and half savage as these men were, they had listened with eager avidity to the teaching of the preachers who had come amongst them. John Wesley and George Whitefield had made their first great successes in districts inhabited by colliers or miners, and although Hownston had not been visited amongst the first years of their itinerating rounds over the country, some of the followers of the great leaders of the movement had lately appeared there. The excitement was all the greater from the fact that knowledge of the character and extent of the work was becoming more general, and exciting interest and remark even among the lowest of the people.

The rustic class looked upon the movement with con-

siderably less of interest, and with more distrust. Old ways were good enough for them, and their slower wits and plodding minds shrank from the rousing which was congenial to their sooty neighbours. So that amongst the individuals of the gathering crowd there was considerable difference of opinion as to the nature of the entertainment in store for them, some being simply curious, some eager, and others hostile to the innovation of street preaching. Amongst the colliers even there were many hundreds who were bitterly opposed to the preachers and their work. Men who rebuked swearing and reproved drunkenness, who permitted in their followers no indulgence, and caused them to be so changed that their own friends scarce knew them again, could not fail to arouse bitter animosity in the minds of their fellows. John Nelson, who was to preach to-day, was, as it were, one of themselves—a working man—a stone-mason, converted through the influence of the Methodists, and become one of their followers. The very men who flocked to hear him were half of them disposed to despise him for his lowly birth, and went as much to scoff as to listen; and when it was whispered that the young gentlemen from near by were going to make sport for the crowd gathered to hear the preaching, it was plain that in case of a riot public opinion would be against rather than for the preacher.

Many were the admiring glances turned upon a little knot of men standing together in a dim archway belonging to the stables of the chief inn of the town. There was the captain, in his gold-laced scarlet coat and cocked hat, and by his side the slim and handsome young man, his cousin, heir to one of the finest properties in the county, leaning against the wall in a negligently graceful attitude, and looking with a supercilious smile at the crowd of eager listeners flocking into the square. With these two fine young gentlemen were about half a dozen stout fellows, who looked as if they might be game-keepers, and who were certainly not residents in the town. One of these men was, however, tolerably well known

by sight in Hownston, and it was whispered about from one to another that if Tom Heron had come there to 'bait the preacher,' Mr. Nelson would have small chance of a hearing that day.

Three o'clock approached, and the crowd had grown very dense. Suppressed excitement began to show itself in the gestures of the people and in the expression of their faces. At last the cry was raised, 'He is coming—the preacher is coming!' and there was immediately a surging movement in the crowd which made it appear for the moment like a tossing sea of heads.

Tom Heron, who had all this while been leaning against the wall in silence, neither joining in the jests of his comrades nor appearing greatly interested in what went on about him, suddenly raised himself and looked about him. His great height enabled him to see over the heads of the crowd, and he observed how the people gave way right and left to admit the passage through their ranks of a tall and broad-shouldered man, who walked fearlessly through the press (which closed upon him till his exit was effectually barred) and took up his station upon the steps of the cross which occupied a commanding place in the open square.

A deep silence fell upon the crowd, the silence of expectation and curiosity. The preacher looked round upon his congregation and gave out a hymn, which appeared to be well known to a certain section of his audience. Tom could not catch the words, save one here and there, but there was something impressive in the sound of a multitude of human voices raised thus in unison, and all singing together with their full power. He himself joined in, hardly knowing he did so, articulating no words, but joining his deep bass to the chorus, and feeling a north-countryman's pleasure in the rolling volume of musical sound. But all the while he kept a heedful eye upon the tall form of the minister. Tom Heron had resolved to distinguish himself to-day. He had been brought here by the gentry to show the stuff of which

he was made, and he meant to leave his mark behind him. He had heard enough about the canting Methodists to welcome with joy this opportunity of putting one of them to silence. He had heard stories of other men who had gone forth to strike down a preacher, and who had ended by becoming converts. Such a thing as that appeared to Tom to be nothing short of absolute lunacy. He did not know how to express his contempt for a man who could be such a poltroon and turn-coat. For his own part, Tom did not know what it was to be touched or impressed by any kind of teaching. Words were to him the feeblest of weapons. He would simply hurl the man down from his pedestal, and silence him once and for all. He eyed with satisfaction the stalwart frame of Nelson. Such a man as that would be an antagonist worth meeting. The muscles of a stone-mason ought to be almost as well seasoned as those of a blacksmith. He hoped the gentlemen would let him manage the offending preacher alone. He wanted no assistance in dealing with him.

Whilst Tom thus mused his opponent had been kneeling in prayer, but he now rose to his feet, and in a loud and clear voice gave out the words of the text from which he proposed to preach,—

‘Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.’

A deep hush fell upon the crowd ; every eye was turned towards the preacher. Tom’s dark, luminous eyes amongst the rest fixed themselves upon the homely face of John Nelson. A scornful sneer was upon the set lips of the young blacksmith. He wondered what manner of folly and madness would issue from the lips of the preacher. There had been times when Tom had been to church, and had heard sermons there. They had seemed to him dull enough, but they had been decently delivered by an accredited clergyman. What had working men like himself to do with teaching and preaching and such matters ? And then the voice of the preacher reached him clear and

strong. It seemed to Tom as though the eyes of the speaker were fixed full upon his face; as though the hand pointed in his direction was pointed full at him, and at him alone.

‘Man, thou art a sinner. When thou openest thy mouth thou speakest blasphemies against the God who made thee. When thou raisest thy hand it is to sin against thy Maker. Thou, a creature, darest to revile the Lord of heaven and earth, to break His laws, to take His name in vain, to put Him to an open shame, and bring His wrath upon thee!’

It was not the words, it was the look of the man which arrested Tom’s attention, the terrible earnestness with which he spoke these and other words of denunciation—drawing a graphic picture of the sins, the degradation, of the world and fallen humanity, and in plain and homely language bringing home to his hearers the blind sinfulness of their ways. Closely following upon this, he spoke of the wrath of God against the impenitent sinner, spoke of the awful holiness, purity, and unapproachableness of God; His everlasting and perfectly just wrath against sinners; the impossibility of His permitting any kind of unholiness in His presence; how that the whole world must perish everlastingly and without hope, perish in the fire that is never quenched, unless—unless some way can be found by which guilty, sin-stained sinners may be reconciled to God. Of hell and its terrors and torments the preacher spoke in no measured terms; faces grew pale as he proceeded, and one or two women sank to the earth half swooning.

‘Come,’ said the captain, his face darkening with scorn and anger, ‘we have stood enough of this; it is getting beyond patience. Billy boy, go in amongst them and beat your drum—loud.’

The little drummer-boy, who had been brought for the purpose, essayed to obey the command of the captain; but he had been listening to the preacher, and his face was pale

and scared. The captain saw this and struck him a sharp blow over the shoulders, which sent the child off, doing his best to drown the voice of the preacher by the bang and rattle of the drum; but Nelson's voice rose clear and strong above the noise, and though there was a sudden laugh amongst the men on the outskirts of the crowd, and a quick movement as if some amongst the number would gladly have silenced that terrible warning voice, the movement was not sufficiently general, and came to nothing, whilst a woman snatched the drum-sticks from the hands of little Billy, and flung them over the heads of the people.

And again the voice of the preacher rolled forth,—

‘But, my brethren, God Himself—the God we have so grievously offended—has Himself made the way of escape for us, whereby we may be saved from hell fire, and become His children. “God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Brethren, think of it. We have done everything human nature, fallen human nature, is capable of to anger God, and He gives to us the most precious gift of His Son to reconcile us again to Him. And what does He ask of us in return? Is it something hard? Is it something that forces us to give up home, friends, livelihood, anything we prize? Is it something which only the rich, the learned, the great ones of the earth can do? Are we poor men to be shut out for ever because we cannot hope to attain unto it? No; a thousand times No! There is only one thing asked of us—that we should believe, nothing else, nothing else. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!” Oh, my brethren, what love is here—what wonderful, boundless love, what mercy, what tenderness for our helplessness, our poverty, our blindness! We have not to understand, we have not to bring costly offerings in our hands, we have not to study, to be wise, to be learned. We are invited to believe, to look at Christ hanging on His Cross; to say, as the poor father

of the possessed child said, "Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief," or, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." That is all, that is enough ; we are asked to believe, and take the offered gift. Oh, why do we not all take it ? Why do we not all take it now, here, this very instant ? It is waiting for us. See, the Lamb of God is here with us now. It is He, He alone, that taketh away the sins of the world. He is here in the very midst of us. He is stretching out His wounded hands over us ; He is saying to us now, as He says every moment of His life, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"—rest from the burden of sin, release from the dread dominion of Satan. Oh, my brothers, hark, listen ! Can you not hear Him speaking ? Oh, listen and believe ! Hang not back from His loving pleading. He is waiting now to welcome in some lost sheep to the fold. Oh, let Him not go empty away ! Let Him not have to return mourning to His Father, and say, "I have been there ; I have heard My name proclaimed, but there was not one who would come to Me. They will not believe, they will not let Me save them." Oh, my brothers, must Jesus go to His Father with that sad story ?

'I say, we have had about enough of this,' said the captain ; 'we shall have the people in raving frenzy next. Tom Heron, you had better put a stop to it. Imaginary conversations between the Father and Son ! It is the rankest blasphemy I ever heard in my life.'

Tom Heron needed no second bidding. He had been standing for some time with clenched hands and quivering muscles, listening to every word the preacher spoke, carried away in spite of himself by the intense earnestness of the man, yet fighting desperately against the long-silent warnings of his own conscience, and longing to stop the flow of those words which seemed to pour into his soul like molten metal. What was it to him ? Why should he care what these ranting Methodists said, when others who knew far better declared them to be liars and madmen ? But Tom had the

gift of imagination, and he could picture to himself the horrors of that everlasting fire, the undying worm ; and he felt as though he would give anything for the power of silencing those terrible warnings. The moment had now come. He sprang forward with a shout of defiance and rage. So sudden was his rush through the packed crowd that the people gave way before him, some falling, others being pushed aside, none resisting him, till the next moment he stood beside the preacher upon the steps of the cross, and had seized the unresisting figure tight in his arms. A roar arose from the crowd, half of indignation, half of sympathy. Many others were there besides Tom who longed to silence the warning voice ; whilst scores who had hung breathlessly upon the preacher's words cried shame upon any interruption of the proceedings.

'Hold un fast !' 'Away with him !' 'Duck him in the horse-pond !' 'No, the river ; fling un in the river !' such were the shouts which arose on one side ; whilst on the other there was a cry of, 'Leave him alone—he is a man of God ! Shame on you, lads, to stop a preacher of the Word.'

But in moments like these it is generally the voice of disorder and riot that prevails. And the turbulent members of the mob outnumbered in Hownston the more quiet and well-disposed. Tom's sudden assault was like the spark to the train of gunpowder. Excitement had been raised to a high pitch by the discourse of the preacher ; now it seemed about to find a vent in the punishment of the bold messenger who had dared to tell the people of their sins, and point out to them the deadly peril in which they stood.

Tom Heron soon found himself in the centre of a knot of fighting, struggling men, all trying to gain possession of the person of the preacher. He knew not which were friends and which were foes, and he himself kept a firm grasp of his captive, marvelling that he neither struggled nor swore, but remained quiet and passive in his clasp. Stones began to fly freely about. One hit Nelson on the temple, drawing

blood. There was a yell from the men nearest, and sticks and bludgeons began to be flourished round them.

‘Dash out his brains! We want none of his jargon!’ cried a dozen voices; and Tom realised now that he and his prisoner were in the midst of those who were enemies to the latter, and would show him scant mercy if they got him into their clutches. Now Tom had an Englishman’s feeling for fair play. He would gladly fight the minister himself single-handed, but he did not wish to have him torn in pieces by the crowd of fierce men who shouted and yelled round him.

‘Leave him to me, lads! He and I will have it out together. Make a ring round us. We will see who can argufy best with his fists—the stone-mason or the blacksmith.’

Tom Heron was well known as the best pugilist in the neighbourhood, and a yell of delight went up from the crowd, who immediately formed a ring round the two men. Tom flung off his coat and bid the other do the same; but Nelson stood looking at him, with a smile upon his face, down which the blood still trickled.

‘Young man,’ he said, ‘I like you. I wish we had more like you with us. I like a man who has no fear, and who loves fair play. But I cannot fight you. I serve a Master who calls Himself the Prince of peace. If you think that it will do you any good—or these poor creatures round us any good—to knock me down and beat out my life, I will grant you free leave to do it. If the sacrifice of my life will do good to any, I make it gladly. You shall be the judge of that. You were the one to pull me down. Have I done anything worthy of stripes or of death? If so, give me over to these men and let me meet my reward at their hands.’

Tom stood silent and aghast at this peculiar method of accepting a challenge. His arms dropped to his sides, and his square face clouded over ominously. He wished to fight; he did not wish to do injury or see injury done in cold blood. But what could be done with a man who refused to fight?

The crowd was less patient. The fury of the people would not stand delay. They had looked to see a sermon end in a stand-up fight, and they were not disposed to be balked of the sport of seeing Nelson mauled and thrown by their favourite champion Tom. Shouts, oaths, and yells rose once again, and when Nelson turned round and openly rebuked those who blasphemed, there was a rush from some



score of the strongest men there, and for a moment the preacher believed that his last hour had come.

But just as the enemy made this charge, Tom Heron sprang once more upon the preacher. He saw what would happen if he did not interpose, and the fighting fury was upon him, though suddenly he had resolved to defend, instead of assaulting, the stone-mason. Seeing that Tom had him again in his clutches, the assailants gave back, and Tom, with a whispered word in his captive's ear, pushed him

headlong through the gaping crowd, and in at the door of the inn. He closed it behind them as they crossed the threshold, crying out as he did so, 'You can leave him to me. I and the gentlemen will settle him now.'

The room into which Tom and his captive were hustled was one which overlooked the market-place, and there sat the rector himself, who had had the curiosity to come and see what passed, though he had taken no active share in this attempt to silence the voice of the preacher. As Nelson entered, torn as to the garments, bleeding from several small wounds, and breathless from the suddenness of this rush through the crowd, the clergyman rose, eyeing him curiously, and saying with a smile to Tom,—

'So you have brought him here to a clerical court, have you, my good fellow? Well, perhaps you have done wisely; it is better to avoid violence whenever one can.' Then, turning to the preacher, he entered into talk with him; asked him many things of his doctrine, speaking all the while very courteously and with a pleasant manner. Nelson, never backward in speech, waxed eloquent upon the favourite theme of instantaneous conversion and salvation; whereupon the rector smilingly shook his head, and doubted such sudden springing up of the seed might betoken stony ground. Nelson looked thoughtful, and for a moment was silent; whereupon the rector told him that he must be careful how he went about telling people that their sins were forgiven, for that he himself had not such consciousness of sudden forgiveness, and many notable divines with whom he had spoken believed that there was no such thing as real forgiveness of sin until the judgment day.

'Then, sir, what will become of their souls until then?' asked Nelson. 'Will they lie in heaven or hell?'

'My good sir, I do not profess to know the mysteries of the unseen world. I am content to know the dead are in the hands of God. That is enough for me.'

'Well, but, sir,' urged Nelson, 'if what you say be true,

every time we use the prayers of the Church we offer the sacrifice of fools, and mock God to His face ; for this day you and all the congregation in my presence prayed God to forgive all your sins, negligence, and ignorances, and you affirmed that God pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe the gospel. If He do not, you are a false witness and a deceiver of the people, yea, and a contemner of the Word of God ; for St. Peter says, "To Him give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins," and St. Paul saith, "By Him all that believe are justified." *Are* justified, mark you, not shall be justified at the day of judgment. And St. John says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."

'Well, well, well !' said the rector, smiling, 'you have a good memory for the Scriptures, and you mean well, though I might find a few texts to puzzle you, if I tried.'

'You may try, and welcome, sir. I wish to be put right if I err.'

'You have too good a memory for me ; and besides, I would not say that you are wrong, though I might say that you hold one side of a doctrine to the detriment of the other, though all you say may be true. Landlady, bring us a pint of wine ; this good man has received some rough handling in yon crowd. Good day to you, sir, I wish you well ; but I do not wish you often in my parish, if this is a sample of the scenes your presence there provokes.'

And with that the rector nodded and moved away, leaving Tom and the preacher alone together.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAWSONS OF SHEEPWOLD FARM.

THE preacher and Tom stood looking one at the other, the former with a smile upon his face, the latter with a strange expression of mingled surprise, contempt, and respect, and in his whole aspect an air of defiance and mistrust that was not to be mistaken. He seemed as if half afraid that Nelson would try and convert him upon the spot, and to be resolved to resist any such attempt.

The landlady had brought the wine, but Nelson did not touch it. He offered it instead to Tom, saying, with a smile,—

‘I think, my friend, that you need it more than I. You had a hard struggle to bring me safe in here, and I thank you for your good offices with all my heart.’

Tom did not altogether relish this way of looking at the matter. He said, with his customary interlarding of oaths,—

‘It was I who pulled thee off the cross, to stop thy noise. We good folks of Hownston want no Methodist ranters and canters. We have our own parsons if we care to hear them—which is not often. If thou carest about a sound skin, I’d advise thee to go thy way without troubling us farther.’

‘Sound skin or not, I must be about my Master’s business—be that what it may,’ answered Nelson. ‘Tell me, young man: dost thou live in this place? I have found work here which will keep me for some few weeks, and I would gladly see more of thee.’

Tom’s reply was couched in terms that would have daunted

most men ; but Nelson was used to rough ways and hard words.

‘My friend,’ he said, ‘I think that thou art one of those of whom men say their bark is worse than their bite. But think of this sometimes, young man : that God will call us to account for every idle word we speak, and for every occasion in which we take His name in vain. “Swear not at all,” said our blessed Saviour. Surely if He hung and suffered on the Cross for us, it is not for us to add to His sufferings, and crucify Him afresh by speaking evil of Him, and blaspheming the name of His Father.’

‘Sir, you speak truth,’ said a voice at the far end of the room, and both Tom and Nelson turned suddenly. A door had opened unnoticed by them, and a man had entered who was well known to the young blacksmith, though a stranger to the preacher. He was dressed in garments which plainly showed him to be a farmer in well-to-do circumstances, and he came forward with outstretched hands, and gave Nelson a warm grip as he said,—

‘That was a powerful sermon you gave us, good sir. I am sorry indeed that this evil loon interrupted you before you had done. I hope that you will come again, and finish in peace.’

‘I trust, good sir,’ answered Nelson, ‘to have many opportunities of addressing the people of this town. But speak not harshly of this youth, I pray you, for he was but set on, I doubt not, by others, who love not to hear the word of life. I saw the young gentleman and his companions, and knew right well that he was but a tool in their hands. For my own part, I thank him heartily ; for but for his good offices and protection it might have gone hardly with me in yon angry crowd. It was he who piloted me safely in hither ; wherefore speak not harshly of him, I pray you.’

‘Well, I am glad to hear it of him,’ answered the farmer, turning to give Tom a searching look, ‘for I have known the

lad from a boy upwards, and little enough good I have known of him either. But he comes of a bad stock on one side, and what's bred in the bone—— We all know the rest.'

A dark flush rose in Tom's face, but he was used to this kind of criticism, and did not really resent it. He liked Farmer Dawson as much as it was in his nature to like any one, and he had been paying a sort of rude court to one of his daughters of late, hardly knowing how far he was serious in his attentions. Sometimes when his home became almost intolerable he would vow that he would marry and set up for himself, and rescue little Molly from her mother's clutches; but again he would reflect that a wife might be a clog and a fetter upon his freedom, and he would keep away from Sheepwold Farm for weeks together. Nelson glanced from one face to the other, and said, with the kindly smile irradiating his homely features,—

'Nay, call him not ill names, good friend. Methinks there is the making in him of a grand servant of Christ. It may be that some day the Lord will touch his heart, and he will be as a brand plucked from the burning. There is all the soldier stuff in him, I doubt not, and better at the first is a bitter foe than a lukewarm friend; as saith the Scriptures, "Because thou art neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of My mouth."'

This sort of talk was so strange to Tom that he listened with a species of fascination. His heart was in no way touched, but his interest and curiosity were aroused. There was something about the personality of Nelson that attracted him in spite of himself. If the man had not been a preacher and a Methodist he would have liked well enough to have made friends with him; as it was, he held aloof with a sullen mistrust. Nevertheless, he was not indisposed to listen whilst Nelson and the farmer talked together of certain points of doctrine upon which the latter wished to be enlightened. It was little more intelligible than Greek to him, but he stood leaning against the door,

and watched the animated face of the preacher with some attention, measuring him physically as well as he was able, and wishing that he had had the chance of standing up against him in a fair fight, and seeing which of the two was the better man. Why would he not fight? Tom wondered. He did not look afraid, he did not appear to be daunted, even when in danger of being stoned or flung into the river. A man who was not a coward, who was bold in face of danger, and could hold his own in argument with the rector (who was counted the most learned man in Hownston), was certainly an enigma to Tom. If not afraid, why did he not fight? It would have pleased the people, and made him into a hero at once. And why was it that Tom himself had felt so strongly impelled to save him from the fury of the mob? How should he explain his own conduct to the gentlemen afterwards? Would they laugh and jeer at him? He could not tell; the ways of the gentry were never quite to be reckoned upon. He had done their bidding, he had effectually stopped the preaching. Perhaps his subsequent conduct would be permitted to pass without comment. Still Tom had no especial wish to face his former comrades just now.

Whilst the farmer and Nelson were still deep in talk the door at the far end of the room opened once again, and Jos, the farmer's son, came in, cautiously shutting the door behind him. He looked surprised at seeing Tom in such company, and gave him a nod indicative of friendly good-will, but he spoke to his father only.

'The mare is in the gig, father, and I thought I would come and tell thee that the crowd is collecting again, saying they will have the minister and duck him in the horse-pond, or put him under the pump. I thought, maybe, if he came out with us they might let him go his way in peace; but if we stay longer they may gather more and more.'

'I will go out to them,' said Nelson, putting on his hat, and standing up smilingly. 'Poor creatures! they know no better; and those who should teach them aright do but

hound them on. For this is their hour and the power of darkness; but God's hand is over His own. He hath many times ere this closed the mouths of the lions. I doubt not it will be the same now.'

'We will all go together, sir,' said Farmer Dawson. 'Tom, my boy, if thou be half the lad I take thee for, with all thy shortcomings, thou wilt go with us and see us through the crowd, if there be one. I will take thee back with me, if thou wilt go. Thou art but a stranger at Sheepwold Farm now. Meg will have a welcome for thee, and if it be as this man of God says, that thou didst save him from harm and bring him safely within these walls, I will forget that thou didst first pull him down and put an end to his discourse. Thou art doubtless led away of others; but I think thy heart is in the right place.'

Farmer Dawson was always in two minds as to his own feelings towards Tom, sometimes vowing that he was a 'good-for-nothing loon,' and should never darken his doors again; at others relenting, and declaring that the lad was a fine lad, despite his wild ways, and was worth reclaiming from them, if anybody had the patience to try and win him back. There was something about Tom that was undeniably attractive, and he had fewer enemies than might have been supposed knowing what an evil life he had led.

'I will go with you,' said Tom briefly, and he marched first to the door, the others following closely behind him.

There was a considerable concourse of people gathered about the inn, but the young gentlemen had disappeared, and there was no leader to organise an attack. The crowd fell back as the four men came out together. The Dawsons were well known and greatly respected, and there was a look on Tom Heron's face which warned men not to interfere with him, or even to ask him which side he was taking in this matter.

Nelson paused as he saw the gathered concourse, and then he said to those about him,—

‘Good friends, I had a message to give you to-day, and that message was interrupted. I think that I will now finish what I had to say to you. Will it please you to listen whilst I do so?’ Not a voice was lifted in opposition. The astonished crowd parted right and left, and Nelson calmly and quietly resumed his station on the steps of the cross, and took up the thread of his discourse just where he had dropped it. In perfect silence the crowd pressed round him to hear, and not a single stone was flung or shout raised all the while the sermon was being preached. The farmer, and his son, and Tom, who had mounted the gig, were penned there by the flocking people pressing round and about them; but they were in no haste to be gone. Jos held the mare, the farmer turned and drank in every word of the discourse, whilst Tom was divided between a reluctant interest and curiosity as to the nature of the preaching, and a sense of great wonder at the calm daring of the preacher, and at the extraordinary way in which, without the smallest show of violence or display of physical strength, he had obtained such a perfect mastery over his hearers.

The mare at length grew fidgety. The preacher was winding up his discourse, the crowd had thinned a little, and the farmer commenced his homeward journey.

‘I wish thy mother had been here, Jos,’ he said, with a deep breath as the cart bowled out of the town, and went jolting along the rough country road; ‘it was a powerful word we heard to-day. I would have liked for her to hear it.’

‘Mother does not hold with these people,’ said Jos doubtfully; ‘I doubt she will be angry that we have gone. She took the rod to Steenie because he said he would like to hear the preacher.’

Farmer Dawson looked just a shade uneasy, and Tom smiled to himself. The mistress of the farm was a Scotch-woman, and there was no denying the fact that she ruled her household with a rod of iron. Her husband never admitted

that he stood in awe of her, and he held his own with a considerable amount of success ; but undoubtedly she was the ruling spirit in the house, and although her floors, her furniture, her pots and pans were as spotless as scrubbing could make them, her dairy, her bread, her beer and cider the very best the country-side could boast, yet there were drawbacks to the peace of the prosperous household at Sheepwold Farm, and it was always a rather serious matter to take any overt step not approved by the mistress.

Tom would have got down as the gig drove hard by Sax, but the farmer bid him come and sup at the farm ; and as there was like enough to be but poor cheer at home, the young man willingly consented. The road was now a mere winding lane, and passed to the north-west of Ernscliff. Tom knew that his little blind sister would be up at the house there, having a Bible lesson from sweet Mrs. Mary, and drinking tea in the housekeeper's room afterwards. There were five little neglected girls in Sax who were thus favoured Sunday by Sunday. Tom wondered if, after supper, he might make bold to call and ask if Molly had gone home, and if not to take her back. Light and darkness were all alike to the blind child, and she sometimes lingered longer than the others. Sunday afternoon was perhaps the brightest spot for her in all the week, and Tom had come to feel a strange reverential admiration for the gentle lady who was the one friend and sympathiser of his little afflicted sister. He had sometimes been spoken to by her when in bad weather he had come for Molly, and, of course, he had often seen her riding or walking past the forge on her way through the village. If she spoke to him at all it was always kindly and sweetly, with that touch of grave remoteness which was at all times observable in her manner, and seemed to remove her from the common level of other women.

Only Tom himself knew how often he had been withheld from some deed of overt wickedness by the thought that Mrs. Mary would hear of it and be sorry ; for Molly told him

frankly how grieved the lady was over any piece of wickedness of which she heard. No one suspected this humanising and civilising sentiment in the young blacksmith's heart. That was his secret, scarcely admitted even to himself.

The gig drove past the horse-shoe bend and up to the farm. As they neared the homestead they saw that Janet Dawson was standing in the doorway watching the road, and it was her voice, with its strong Scotch intonation, which was the first sound to reach them as Jos drove quietly into the yard.

'Is it thus ye break the Sabbath day, John?' asked the inexorable wife as her husband descended and approached her. 'I doubt not ye thought to deceive me, gadding off thus in the early morn. Hech, mon, but ye will have much to answer for ane day, taking the lad wi' ye and all. I ken where the pair of ye has been. Ye have been listening to those false doctrines which Wesley is teaching his followers, to delude the world and tempt men to their destruction. It is an ill thing for ye to do.'

'Nay, nay, wife. I only wish you had been there and the girls, and all. We had a powerful preaching—was it not, Jos? Wife, be not hard on the lad. I took him with me. He is of an age to think and judge for himself; and the man spake not a word bad or good but what he had a text of the Bible to show for it. I would you had heard him. He would have convinced you, I verily believe.'

'Convinced me? What need I of convincing? I know my Bible, I doubt not, as well as he!'

Whilst the husband and wife were hotly striving to convince each other of error—the worthy couple had not yet learnt how futile is argument upon such points—the sons and daughters had gathered about Tom and Jos, and were eagerly asking them for their account of the preaching. Jos was exalted into something of a hero at home for having been taken to this stronghold of Satan, and when they heard that Tom had actually been instrumental in stirring up a riot,

and in putting the preacher to silence, they looked at him with mingled awe and admiration. Meg, the younger daughter, to whom Tom was at times disposed to pay special attentions, looked at him with increased interest and favour. It was not that she especially admired him for what he had done, but for the boldness of the spirit which had actuated him; and she thought that her mother would be pleased to hear of his prowess, seeing that she so disapproved of the preacher and his words.

But there was no knowing how to take Janet Dawson. Although she had inveighed against the new doctrines with the whole force of her eloquence, yet she listened in grave displeasure to the story of Tom's prowess, as detailed for her benefit at supper, and turning with severity upon the young man, she rated him soundly for his evil courses, his constant and inveterate Sabbath-breaking, and his lack of reverence for holy things. Tom tried to suggest that she herself had shown that these new doctrines were of the devil, and therefore not holy; but she sharply pulled him up by telling him that a vessel of wrath like himself was no judge upon such matters, and that no man, coming Bible in hand, and speaking in the name of God, was to be evilly entreated by such as he, be his doctrine what it might. Whereby an impartial listener might have judged that Janet Dawson was not altogether as harsh a woman as she tried to appear when falling foul of her husband for disobeying her wishes.

But Tom was perplexed, and rendered both scornful and impatient. It seemed to him that amongst professed Christians there was nothing but strife, bickering, hard words, and harsher thoughts, not for sinners alone, but for one another. No two people ever did appear to agree where religion was under discussion. Tom had meant to stop the evening, but he grew impatient and disgusted by the disputes at the table, and making an excuse of fetching Molly, he hurried away as soon as the six o'clock supper was over.

Ernscliff was but half a mile away as the crow flies, and

Tom went straight across the field-path, which was but little longer. He was told as he passed through the stable-yard that his sister was in the garden—the wilderness shrubbery garden away by the river, and that he might go and look for her there. He willingly obeyed, feeling something of the peaceful stillness and calm which always seemed to be brooding over this place, and very soon he heard the sound of voices, which sound made him pull himself up short, wondering if he might not be intruding.

But as he stood still listening he heard the familiar voice of the blind child talking with somebody, and asking questions.

‘Then they are not wicked men? Is it wicked to go and hear them?’

‘No, dear, it is not wicked. They try to do good, and I think they often turn wicked men from their bad ways, and bring them nearer to God again.’

‘Tom has gone to-day to hear them,’ said the clear childish voice again. ‘Oh, Mrs. Mary, do you think they will make him good?’

‘My child, no man can do that.’ Tom’s face contracted with pain. He thought the lady of Ernscliff meant that he was irreclaimable from thenceforth; but as she proceeded he felt that that had not been altogether her meaning, and he listened breathlessly. ‘It is the Spirit of God which alone can turn us to Him; and that good Spirit cannot enter our hearts unless we open them to Him and pray that He will. We have all fallen away from God our Heavenly Father, and often our sins have grown and grown until we cannot see Him, or hear His voice calling us. Then it is that we must look to Jesus to wash away our sins in His blood, so that the Holy Spirit may come into our hearts, for He cannot dwell there when they are all wicked and impure. These men of whom we hear so much are going about trying to make men repent and turn to God; and though they may often be men ignorant of much, and may not teach all that the Bible does, and that God would have

His children know, yet they are truly His servants and ministers, and love Him and serve Him faithfully; and therefore we must respect them and listen reverently to them, and see the good that they do, and not dwell only on their little mistakes, as some people like to do. We must try to feel very glad that so many poor ignorant men are willing to listen to God's Word, and that their hearts are touched by the Holy Spirit. And we can pray that Tom's may be touched too, and that he may become a good man.'

'Do you ever pray for Tom?' asked the blind child, with wonder in her tone, and Tom listened with a strange breathlessness for the answer.

'Yes, dear, I pray for Tom too,' answered the lady of Ernscliff; and Tom waited to hear no more, but stole silently away from the spot, and went home after all without his little sister.

CHAPTER V.

THE LADIES OF ERNSCLIFF.

‘**L**ADIES, I have come to you to take counsel. I have come to you for advice.’

The speaker was a thin, spare man of about forty summers, attired in clerical garb, somewhat threadbare, though spotlessly neat and clean. He had an intellectual face, with a sweet and thoughtful smile; whilst the hectic flush upon his cheek and the slight stoop of his tall figure suggested the idea of frail health and the insidious advance of pulmonary disease.

This individual was none other than Mr. Latham, the curate of Sax, put in by Rector Fortescue, who held the living. Although a scholar and a man of gentle birth, his ill-health obliged him to live very quietly and in the pure air of the country. Small as was the stipend allowed him, he contrived to live in fair comfort, the lodger of a widow woman, whose cottage was situated half-way between the village of Sax and the hamlet around Ernscliff; and he was far more at home at the house of the ladies of the latter place than in any other house in his parish.

The ladies, who were in their pleasant summer parlour, the oriel windows of which overlooked from a considerable height the river of Erne and a stretch of wooded country beyond, welcomed the curate with gentle courtesy; and from the way in which he seated himself in a high-backed easy chair, and drew it a little forward, to be nearer them, it was plain that he was no unfrequent guest in that sunny room.

'The best counsel that we have is always yours to command, dear sir,' answered Mary, with a smile; 'but it is rather we who need counsel from you—our spiritual adviser and pastor.'

The clergyman's thin face lighted pleasantly at these words. It was not in many houses that his office was thus acknowledged and respected. A poor curate was a person of small importance in those days in the eyes of the bulk of his parishioners. Carelessness in religious matters, latitudinarian doctrine, good-humoured scepticism, were all the fashion of the day, combined with the laxity of morals and the low standard of spiritual discipline which always must accompany the deadening influence of an age that attempts to put aside the Word of God, and set up in its place the discoveries and the doctrines devised by man. The clergy largely shared the prevailing scepticism of the age. True indeed it is that champions such as the immortal Bishop Butler had appeared to fight upon the side of truth; but the general spirit was one of careless levity, or of something worse, and in many parishes throughout the kingdom the very clergy themselves were foremost in the ranks of those who lived for sport of all kinds, who drank and gamed, swore and gambled, attempted nothing save the perfunctory performance of the duties of Sunday, and left their flock throughout the week to take care of itself as it best might.

Many and bright as were the exceptions to so low a standard of rule and discipline, there could be no doubt that the clergy were held in considerable contempt at this time. People might not desire faithful shepherds, but they were ready enough to condemn those who occupied this position because they were unfaithful. A wealthy, fox-hunting, jovial parson, who lived the life of an ordinary country gentleman, was often popular enough in his parish; but the poorer men, and particularly the curates-in-charge, were very slightly treated. Mr. Latham, whose saintly life

and consistent Christian walk had impressed even the roughest of his parishioners, had not gained, even at the end of fifteen months of hard work, that respect which now would be accorded him almost as a matter of course at the outset. His predecessors had been men of a very different stamp, and a new man with new ways was regarded with suspicion. It was thus very pleasant to him to hear himself spoken of as a pastor and friend by gentle Mrs. Mary.

‘You have doubtless heard something of what occurred at Hownston last Sunday? A stone-mason attempted to preach in the market-place, and was pulled down by—I regret to have to say it—Tom Heron of Sax, instigated, I fear, by those who should have known better what was due to any man coming in the Name of all names. To-day I was summoned to Rookwood by the squire’s lady. She told me that she was greatly annoyed by the near approach of these Methodist preachers, and was resolved they should never obtain any footing in Sax. But her especial charge to me was that next Sunday morning I should preach in the church here a sermon in condemnation of itinerant preachers and their doctrines. She bids me not spare them, but hold them up to ridicule and reprobation. She intends to command the whole village to attend the service and listen to the discourse, and bids me couch my sermon in very plain words, easy to be understood, that all may learn how evil a thing these “new doctrines” are.’

Mary looked up from her embroidery with an expression of keen interest in her eyes, whilst old Mrs. Ernscliff—a lovely old lady, whose very face was enough to tell to those who could read its signs aright of a soul living very close to Heaven—raised her calm blue eyes with a sweet smile in them, and looked across the sunny valley, as she softly said,—

“‘See how these Christians love one another.’”

‘What shall you do?’ asked Mary breathlessly.

She did not exclaim in astonishment at hearing that

madam had issued such an order to the clergyman. Astonishing as such a thing would be in these days, it was nothing very unwonted then. The curate was looked upon something in the light of a servant—a paid servant of the rector, or of the squire of the place ; and in Sax, where the Fortescue influence was all-pervading, there was nothing very strange in its exercise even over matters spiritual.

‘I said that I would think about it,’ answered Mr. Latham, a slight flush upon his pale face. ‘I fear that madam understood me to say that I would think over what I could say that would be most scathing, for she dismissed me graciously, and said that she and all her household would be there to hear me next Sunday morning, and all the village as well. I bowed and retired. I had nothing more to say to her. It is to you I have ventured to come for counsel and advice.’

Mary’s face wore that expression of bright gravity which bespoke a vivid interest and wide intelligence.

‘It might be a noble opportunity for teaching the people,’ she said, ‘for they would listen if they thought that it was to be an attack on the Methodists. But you could hardly make it that, I trow, dear sir ; for by what I have understood you to say, you look upon their work as a noble one—done in the service of God?’

‘I do,’ answered the clergyman earnestly ; ‘I truly believe that in these men the Spirit of God is working. As I have said again and again, what they teach is no new doctrine ; it is the doctrine which we churchmen hold—or ought to hold by the very vow we made at our ordination. I know well that, when Mr. Wesley and his brother went forth to teach and preach, they no more meant to stir up strife and to be called the enemies of the Church than I do myself. Of their doings and their doctrines of late years I know less. There are times when, from what I hear, I fear that they may have somewhat fallen from their first standpoint ; that they—urged doubtless thereunto by their followers, who

have but too good cause to feel themselves outcasts from the Established Church—have commenced to form themselves into a body, a society, an organisation, which in time may lead them to a formal schism. I hear they have built chapels—I will not say this is wrong; but if they draw away from parish churches those who would otherwise go there, and fix their services at the church hours; if they gradually lead their followers to think that if they are Methodists they are not also members of the Established Church—though of the Church Universal they must and will always remain; if, above all things, they, in days to come, begin to call themselves after the name of a man, after the fashion of many bodies—then and without doubt there will be made by their means another schism in the Catholic Church, rending the Body of Him who longs to see His Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing—that He may present it faultless to His Father as His holy Bride.¹ It is this that I dread to see; this that I pray may not take place. It may be that it will be our doing if it does—we will not hear the Spirit of God speaking in these men; we drive them forth from among us, and they, half of necessity, half out of despite—for we are all frail human beings, and subject to passions of wrath and jealousy—go forth, shaking off the dust from their feet, and return no more to us, but become in a certain sense of the term our adversaries and opponents. Yet we are all the servants of one Master, called by His sacred Name, baptised into His Body, heirs of His kingdom. Oh, it is a sorrowful, sorrowful thing to think of! How can Christ ever come in glory to claim His

¹ It may be expedient to remind our readers that this story is not designed for the discussion of ecclesiastical or theological questions. If they obtrude at all, it is because they are characteristic of the stirring times in which its scenes are laid, and natural to the personages introduced; but the writer has no sectarian motive, and follows strictly the impartial record of history. Many forgot in those days, as many forget now, that the true Church, 'the Bride of Christ,' is undividable as well as invisible. Contention and 'schism' affect visible organisations only.

Bride, when she is thus divided—rent in pieces, engaged in warring with her own children, when she should be preparing herself to meet Him, when He comes to call her? Oh, if we were but living in that one hope, as were the apostles and Christians of old, we should forget to differ and quarrel one with another; we should have our hearts and eyes firmly fixed above, waiting and watching for Him, who assuredly will one day come in glory, ever striving to be found walking in love and unity below, bound closer and closer together in the bonds of that love and hope which we are so prone to forget and to put aside.'

The thin face of the clergyman had caught a strange radiance as he spoke. His hands unconsciously clasped themselves together, his eyes shone with a vivid light. Something of the same look was reflected in the countenances of the two ladies, and Mary cried impulsively,—

'Ah, if you could but teach our people that lesson! Oh, why do we not love one another more? Can you not preach that doctrine to us on Sunday?'

As this question was asked, recalling the subject from which the talk had strayed, the light faded somewhat from the face of Mr. Latham, and he sighed a little as he said,—

'I must think, and pray for guidance in this matter. I will preach nothing that shall disgrace my Christian calling and profession; nothing that shall teach men that servants of the same Master must be enemies of one another. I came to you for sympathy, and I know I get it in full measure. I would not willingly offend any man—not the poorest of my flock. I would not willingly vex madam, or seem to disregard her wishes. There is some reason in her opposition, some truth in her bitter words, and I may not deny it; yet I would I could bring her and others to see that beneath the rough and imperfect outer shell lies a kernel of priceless truth. Again I would seek, had I the chance, to strive and show these brethren of ours, who are so nobly fighting the battle of Christ, that they stand

something in danger of holding so fast on one portion of truth that they lose sight of others. I would have them be content with affirming what they hold, and beg them to leave denials alone. In God's Word there are so few negatives—almost all that men affirm may be found in some form there; but men will take that Word piece by piece, and in affirming one great truth, deny the supplementary truths which are accessory, as notably in the doctrine of justification by faith. But I weary you with my discourse. I always find such rest and peace in coming here with a difficulty. It seems of itself to smooth itself away in this quiet room. But I must say farewell now. I have many duties pressing upon me to-day.'

A little more talk and the clergyman was gone, having, as was so often the case on his visits, done most of the actual talking himself, and yet gone away refreshed and strengthened. Old Mrs. Ernscliff looked after him with a smile in her eyes, and said, in her gentle way,—

'Methinks in yon good man the Spirit of God is truly working. Had we more like him, our world would be a brighter, holier, happier place than it is. I trust we may keep him long amongst us yet.'

'If he offends Madam Fortescue, I fear she will never let him stay,' said Mary doubtfully.

'I was thinking of something different, my dear,' said the old lady. 'I sometimes feel, as I look into his face, that he is one of those upon whom God has set a seal, and that He will call him to some work elsewhere, of which we know nothing. If he should lose the curacy of Sax, I think we would yet ask him to remain amongst us. He has done more for our poor people at Ernscliff than has ever been done for them before.'

Visitors appeared to be the order of the day at Ernscliff this bright afternoon. Hardly had these words passed Mrs. Ernscliff's lips, than the door was once more thrown open, and the butler announced in loud tones, 'Miss Fortescue.'

Mary looked up, half expecting to see Irene, but the tall and blooming girl advancing into the room was a very different being from the pale and shrinking Miss Fortescue of Rookwood. The stranger was attired in a green riding-habit, laced with silver cord, and the jaunty green hat was adorned by a floating plume of dazzling whiteness. The girl's dark eyes were dancing with health and spirits, and the damask bloom upon her cheeks bespoke the glowing vitality which seemed to radiate from her.

'Athol!' exclaimed Mary, going to meet her, 'this is an unexpected pleasure.'

'I have come to give you a real good scolding!' cried the new-comer, as she bent to kiss Mary, and then moved gracefully across the room towards the old lady, whom she saluted in like fashion. 'I do not know when I saw you last. You are growing quite a stranger to Hownston. There *was* a time when I flattered myself that you did feel just a shade of liking for poor frivolous me; but now I find that if I am to keep myself in remembrance at all, it must be by my own unassisted efforts. Fie, Mrs. Mary! It is not like you to be so fickle! Who is to keep me in any kind of order if you turn your back upon me?'

Mary smiled, though there was a tinge of colour in her face which bespoke an emotion not entirely agreeable. She was too self-possessed to be embarrassed, but there was perhaps the least little bit of constraint in her manner as she said,—

'The winter has been so long and cold that I seldom went into Hownston, and since the spring came upon us with a burst I have been very busy. You know, I farm my own estate. I am a working woman, Athol, and not a lady at large, like you.'

Athol laughed merrily.

'Yes, and you work a great deal too hard. People do not have model estates for nothing, and everybody knows that Ernscliff is a perfect Utopia. Mrs. Ernscliff, I think that

Mary is looking pale and fagged. I know how it always is with her when she will not give herself even a day's thorough change and recreation. I have come to insist upon her fulfilling a long-standing promise of spending a week with me. Now, Mary, you cannot deny that it is a promise. You made it quite six months ago. I am very long-suffering, but I will not be put off for ever. Mrs. Ernscliff, I appeal to you. Do you not think it would do her good ?'

'I think it would, my dear,' answered the old lady, with a glance from one girl to the other. By Athol's blooming face the countenance of gentle Mary did look something too pale and thoughtful. 'It is good for the young to have change from time to time, and a week can be spared even by our busy Mary.'

'There—you hear that ? Thank you, Mrs. Ernscliff ; I accept that as final. Mary, you shall come next week ; I have it all planned ;' and then Athol linked her arm within that of Mary and drew her through a little side door which opened upon the terrace walk, looking laughingly into her grave face.

'My dearest prude, you need have no fears. Do you think I do not see straight through you and your grave looks ? But make your mind easy ; George will not be at home. He has just had orders to join his regiment in York. Although I perfectly long for you to make the poor fellow happy, and to have you for a sister, I have the sense to know that whilst you remain unwilling it is worse than useless for him to pester you with attentions. Man-like and clumsy as the dear boy is, he would never see this for himself ; so I just waited till he was quietly out of the way, for I do not mean to lose your friendship, because you cannot see your way to be anything more than a friend. And now that you know all this, say that you will come with a good grace, and be our guest for a week.'

Mary's face had cleared considerably, and she now pressed Athol's hand affectionately.

‘I shall be very glad to come. I should be as sorry as you for any cloud to come between us. It is very good of you not to be vexed because I cannot think of your brother as you wish.’

‘Well, it would be ridiculous to make what George calls a *casus be’li* out of that. For my own part, I think he is a very fine fellow, and wish very much that you did the same; but I always do say that a man like George can scarcely expect to pick up for his wife the ideal woman that you are.’

‘Athol, Athol, be not so foolish!’

‘I am not foolish; it is the one sign of sound sense that I possess, having made a friend of you. Whenever I am extra wild—and that has occurred frequently of late—Aunt Bridget always laments that I see so little of you. She will be delighted to hear that I have really secured my prize, and so will father. And, oh, Mary, you will come at a good time for stirring scenes! You will see amongst other sights something of the baiting of these new preachers, which our youth seems to like quite as well as the baiting of bulls or of bears.’

Mary’s face was a little grave.

‘Take care, Athol; I like not a jest carried too far.’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon humbly, but I thought you were the most orthodox of all orthodox, and that one could speak plainly to you. Sax is always held up as a model place; it was one of your village champions who was the hero of the day last Sunday. I had a dim idea he was something of a *protégé* of yours.’

‘It is his little sister I try to befriend,’ answered Mary quietly; ‘I was sorry that Tom had been the instigator of riot.’

‘Well, he was scarcely that; it was George who planned it all. He and Fulk were resolved to put a stop to it, and Tom Heron and some others were in their employ. As it turned out, there was no great amount of fighting, and Tom did the work very neatly. Unluckily, after the boys had

gone, the crowd gathered again, and in the end the preacher finished his discourse unmolested ; but they have a warmer welcome than that ready for him another time. Hownston is not going to let itself be reformed by the Methodist ranters.'

Athol spoke with the gaily contemptuous manner of a really profound indifference. As the rector's daughter, she felt it incumbent upon her to side with those who assailed and condemned innovation ; but as a matter of fact the whole thing was a matter of no moment at all to her. She was scarcely interested in it ; only a little amused at the thought of a disturbance and the exercise of authority wielded by her brother.

'George will be away, but there are others to take it up for him. I think Fulk will for one ; he was very much disgusted by what he heard ; it seemed to be horribly profane. Possibly George might ride over himself. Sunday is the day for that sort of sport.'

Mary made no reply, and Athol rattled on upon all manner of subjects, not in the least aware how her words struck her companion. Careless, high-spirited, instinct with an overflowing vitality, the spoiled child of her father and a universal favourite wherever she went, it was perhaps little wonder that Athol Fortescue was something between what in modern parlance would be designated a hoyden and a butterfly. It might almost be asked what attraction there could be between herself and Mary Ernscliff. Perhaps it was the affinity of contrast that drew them together, or possibly there were depths in Athol's nature which she herself had never sounded, but which Mary had instinctively discovered. Athol was wont to declare that association with Mary made her 'feel good,' and, despite continual difference of opinion, the girls were real friends.

'You will not fail us—you will really come ?' urged Athol, as she mounted her horse at the close of her visit, and leaned forward to speak her final adieus to Mary ; and she, looking up with a smile, replied,—

‘Yes, I will come next week. We shall have a great deal to talk about. I shall have something to find fault with, Athol; so be prepared to be lectured.’

‘I will—I need it—I feel that I do. You have kept away too long, Mary. But when we have you we will keep you, and if you are anxious to look at the wild animals nearer, we have the lion-tamer Nelson, working in a stone-mason’s yard quite close to the rectory. I mean one day to go and talk to him.’

‘I will go with you,’ said Mary gravely; and Athol, with a merry laugh, cantered off along the shady road.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VILLAGE HERO.

‘**I**T is impossible but that offences will come ; but woe unto him through whom they come.’

These were the words which fell upon the expectant ears of the congregation gathered together in the little old church at Sax, upon a bright Sunday in May—a congregation unusually large and most unusually attentive ; for had it not been rumoured abroad that Mr. Latham was about to preach a sermon against the Methodists and their revivalist work ? and was it not the duty of every good churchman, and even of every person in the village, to go and hear the discourse ? The more so as madam from the great house was said to have commanded that such a sermon should be preached, and was present herself with her whole household.

Strange to say, Tom Heron was also there. It was seldom indeed that he entered the doors of the church. His Sundays were habitually spent in riotous amusement, in drinking, dicing, and too often in fighting ; but he had heard at the Red Dragon of the attack to be made upon the preacher whose discourse he had interrupted, and he was resolved for once to be there to hear.

The temporary impression produced upon Tom by the words and the deportment of Nelson had been entirely obliterated from his mind by the sensation produced upon his village associates through the news of his exploit in the market-place of Hownston. Tom had come back to Sax to find himself famous. The tale was in every one’s mouth—

grossly exaggerated, of course ; he was reported to have knocked the preacher down ; to have engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with him ; to have led a charge against Nelson and his followers which had ended in a pitched battle. There was no end to the versions of the story in circulation, the only point of agreement being that Tom had been the hero of the affair ; and accordingly he had been treated, sought after, and made much of to an extent which had gone far to turn his head. Even madam at the great house had sent him a crown piece as a mark of her approbation ; and he had not done a stroke of work the whole week, but had spent almost the whole of his time at the Red Dragon, indulging for once in a regular drinking bout ; not that he particularly enjoyed this particular form of amusement, but because it helped him best to forget some of the words of the preacher, which had a tiresome way of forcing themselves into his mind without any volition on his part, just at the time he most wished to forget them.

Once during the course of the week he had seen the lady of Ernscliff ride by on her pony, as he had been lounging outside the door of the public-house, swearing lustily over a game of bowls that he and his comrades were playing on the strip of green between the bridge and the inn. He had not seen her approach, but turning round with some foul words in his mouth, he met her grave, sorrowful gaze fixed full upon him, and the words died away in silence, whilst an unwonted flush of shame dyed his swarthy cheek. He pulled off his cap with a shamefaced salutation, and Mrs. Mary bent her head, saying in a very low tone as she passed,—

‘I am sorry, Tom—very sorry to see you here, and in such company. I am afraid now that what I hear of last Sunday may be too true. I never would have willingly believed that Tom Heron could be a coward.’

The young blacksmith started as if he had been stung. Had a man spoken that word to him he would have answered

for it by feeling the strength of the sledge-hammer hand; but Mary Ernscliff passed on her way unmolested, leaving Tom standing in the road with heaving chest and flashing eyes. The sting of her words lay in his own consciousness of their truth. Others had praised and lauded him to the skies, so that Tom had almost forgotten his own faint misgivings on the subject; but there had been moments when he had felt that it had been the work of a coward to attack an unresisting man, and practically set a savage crowd upon him, even though afterwards he had turned the protector of his intended victim. Mrs. Mary had most likely heard the wilder versions of the story—she would never know but that he had knocked the preacher down and trampled him in the dust, and all but kicked the life out of him. Hitherto Tom had rather gloried in these rumours, and he had never contradicted them, for they salved over his feeling of incipient shame at having relented in the moment of his triumph. He was glad that none of his comrades knew that he had really fought to get the preacher safely through the crowd. How they would have gibed and jeered him if they had been aware of this! Now he almost wished that they had known—or at least that Mrs. Mary could hear of it. Glegg, the sexton, was very great upon the feelings of the gentry, and how they hated these Methodist disturbers of the peace; but some instinct told Tom that the ladies of Ernscliff would never hold with a brutal attack upon any man who came to teach the people in the name of God.

Then, as has before been said, Mary Ernscliff, little as he saw of her, was the one star and sun in the darkened firmament of this strange young life—the one being whom Tom Heron thoroughly revered and looked up to. He loved his afflicted little sister, but it was with the love of pity—the love of the strong for the weak. Mrs. Mary was to him as some angelic being in another sphere, to be regarded as a thing apart—almost as a deity. There would pass weeks and even months of his life when he might never even

think of her ; but the feeling of worship was lying latent all the while, and some chance encounter would stir it into fresh life. As he stood looking after her down the road he remembered the words he had heard her speak to blind Molly, not yet a week old. She prayed for him—she had said so—and this was how she had found him, and she thought him a coward ! Flinging down his bowl with a barely restrained oath—oh, how terribly ready were the evil words to spring to his lips !—he strode gloomily away, and presently made his way to his own home, and taking his little sister out into the meadows by the river, he made her tell him of her lady's words to her, and listened to her artless prattle with a heavy shadow on his brow.

That had all happened on Saturday evening, and Sunday found Tom for once in church, eager to hear the discourse which, as all the world was saying, would show up the follies, the papistical errors, the hypocrisy and wickedness of these Methodist ranters, and which he hoped would lay to rest these incomprehensible sensations of gnawing anxiety and uneasiness which he had suffered from more or less persistently for the whole of the past week. There was a strong feeling in the village that Mr. Latham, although only a poor curate, and of small repute from a worldly standpoint, was a clever man and a good one ; and Tom felt that if only he could hear him launching anathemas at the heads of these new preachers, he should feel relieved once and for all from the burden of heavy-heartedness so unwonted and unwelcome to him. Wherefore he resolved to listen with attention, and as his intelligence was considerable, though his education was very imperfect, he was not afraid of not being able to follow the drift of the discourse.

As the words of the text fell upon the ears of the silent congregation he saw that a little flutter went round the church. Madam, in the curtained parlour which was called by courtesy a pew, drew the curtain a little farther back, and settled her lace mantle about her shoulders with an air

of attentive satisfaction. Mrs. Irene's face was full of interest, and the squire leaned forward with his eyes full upon the preacher. From where he stood, far back in the crowded church, Tom could not see the ladies of Ernscliff; he wished he could. But he had brought Molly with him to hear the sermon, and he was obliged to remain beside her all the while. Then the young man turned his eyes towards the pale, thin face of the preacher, illuminated by the strange light which from time to time irradiated his countenance when he was much moved, and concentrated all his attention upon the sermon.

'We are met together to-day, my brethren, to consider a very solemn subject—the subject of "offences," or "stumbling-blocks" put in the way of others. And first of all let us pause a moment to consider what is meant by that term. In its broadest sense it might be applied to hindrances of every kind; but it also may have a more restricted and particular application, and it is in this restricted sense in which I propose to-day to bring it to your consideration. . . . We are told by our blessed Lord Himself that it must needs be that offences will come. What offences? Offences to "His little ones"; as we are told in the corresponding passage in St. Matthew's Gospel, "It were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." In St. Luke's Gospel, from which our text is taken, this warning follows immediately upon the parable of Dives and Lazarus—follows those most solemn words, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

'Turning once again to St. Matthew's Gospel, we find closely following the solemn warning on the subject of offences these words in reference to arbitration in disputes, 'And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.'

‘My brethren, it appears to me, after careful study of these two passages and their context in both places where this solemn warning occurs, that our Saviour had in His mind when uttering them—amongst many other forms, doubtless, of hindrance to His little ones—that form which comes to them through false teachers and incompetent preachers. His little ones are surely His flock—those countless thousands of Christian people—Christians of all denominations—who call upon His holy Name, and look to His atonement as their salvation. This flock is to be fed, but by whom? It is this point for which I wish for a moment to ask your careful consideration.

‘We see throughout God’s dealings with us in the world’s history, that it is His way to appoint different men to different functions; and He has shown us from very early times that He resents it when men assume to themselves functions not appointed by Him. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were Levites, separated for the special service of God; but they desired a higher office. They said, quoting God’s own words, as it were against Himself, “Are not all the congregation holy,” set apart from the world?—and we know the fate that fell upon them. Was that lesson recorded for Jews alone? I do not believe that any warning in the Holy Book is restricted to any one nation. All are for the consideration and admonition of the whole human race. Let us look again at Saul, at Jeroboam, who offered sacrifices when called to no priestly function; what fate, what retribution fell upon them? They were called to one high office; yet, not content with that, they took upon themselves another, became the author of an offence, and suffered accordingly. . . .

‘Passing from the Old Testament to the New, we still find the same lesson set before us, namely, that God divides to us His gifts severally, and bids us use them to His glory. Some He has made apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. These are severally the represen-

tatives of the Church—its recognised ministry—appointed for the work of God. Thus again we hear of bishops, of elders and deacons, each with his own separate office and functions, according to the gifts, conferred upon him by God Himself. . . .’

Tom’s attention here began to stray. He felt certain that very soon these self set-up Methodists were going to ‘catch it hot’; but listening was hard work to him, and he could not help being amused at the self-satisfied expression of madam’s face, as she leaned back in her chair, and gently fanned herself, looking round on the people about her, as though she considered herself really the originator of the discourse which was to culminate in a fierce denunciation of her special foes. Tom rather looked forward to hearing this himself, but plainly the sermon was going to be a pretty long one, and he could take up the thread later on.

But the next thing that attracted his straying attention was the fact that madam was sitting erect with an angry flush upon her face, and a baleful light in the eyes she had fixed upon Mr. Latham’s face. This made Tom turn his attention once more to the preacher, and then he quickly understood the cause of the great lady’s discomfiture.

‘My brethren, we have seen how offences have come to the little ones of the flock through the action of those who take upon them offices to which they are not called by God; who make themselves guides—blind leaders of the blind, false prophets, hirelings in the flock, leading them astray, and fleeing from them in the hour of danger. But there is another and a very solemn converse to this picture, and one which it behoves us most seriously to lay to heart. There is another class of offences, and woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! What are the little ones to do when their recognised shepherds fail them? When those who are bound by their vows to feed and tend them trample the pasture down, and foul the water with their feet? Or, to speak in plain language a plain and awful truth, what is to happen

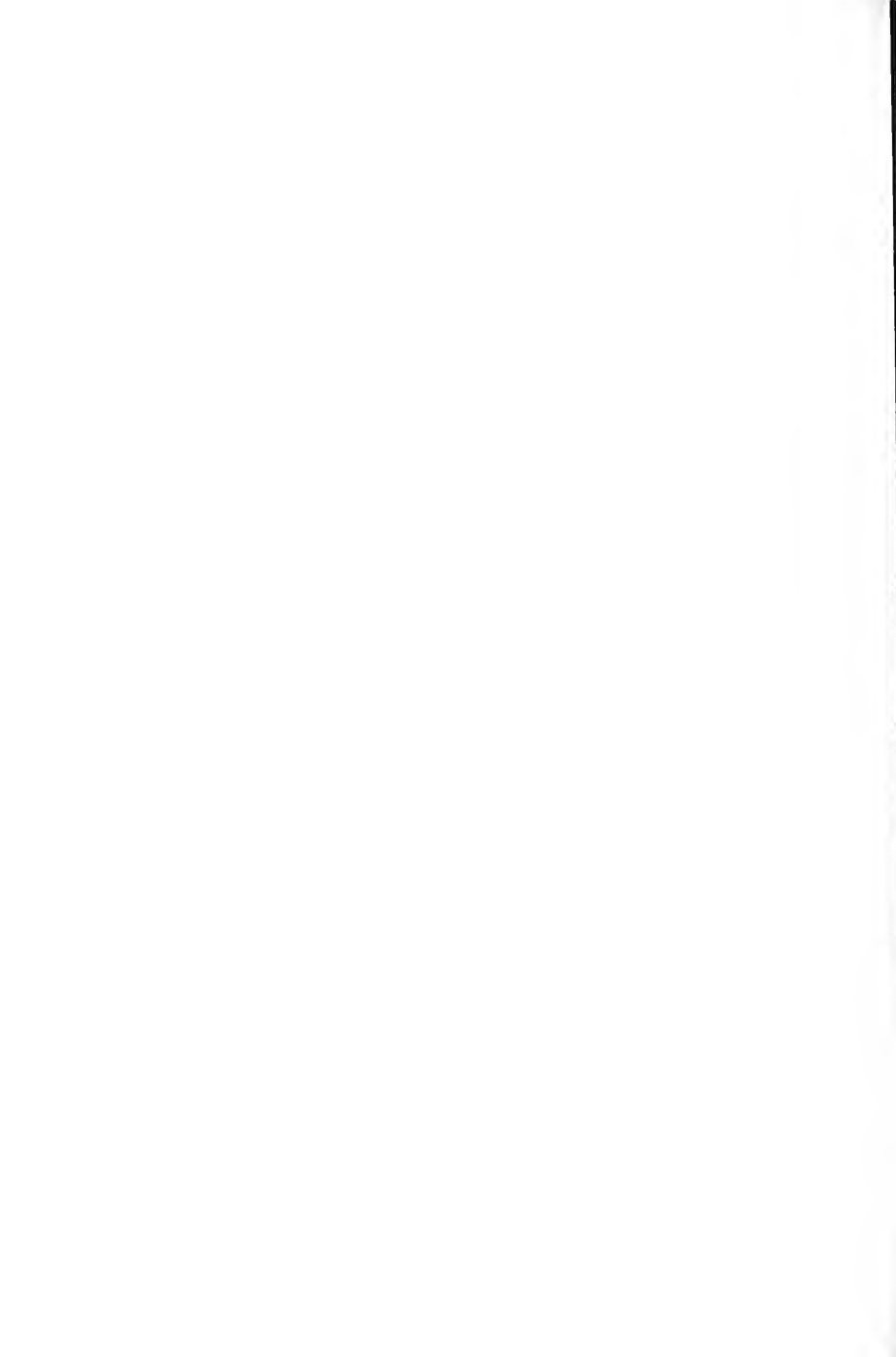
when the Church herself, in the persons of her appointed ministers, becomes unfaithful to her calling? Brethren, this thing has happened before; it may be it is happening even now. Yet though we are unfaithful to God, He is faithful, He is true. He will not leave us comfortless. In some form or other He will most certainly come to us. Let us see in times of old how He worked. In the days of Eli the Word of the Lord was "precious"—scarce—hardly to be heard. There was a high priest truly, but one who could not even rule his own house; one to whom the Lord would not reveal Himself. What does He do? He puts before the priest a woman praying in anguish for a boon from the Lord, and the priest, having lost the God-given power of discernment which by right belonged to his office, rebukes her, calls her mad, drunken, unfit to be before the Lord. But God hears that prayer; God sends her her heart's desire. A son is born to her, and though that son be not of the priestly line, he is ordained by God Himself to do the work which the anointed priest has failed to do. . . .

'Brethren, it comes to this: God has His appointed ways and ordinances, but if, owing to the frailty and unfaithfulness of man, these ordinances have become corrupt, have ceased to be what they were meant to be, channels of grace and blessing, God will pass them by and put power upon those whom He has chosen. God will feed His flock; He will not leave His children without bread. If the shepherds prove unfaithful, He will provide others. And, oh, my brethren, it behoves us solemnly to ask ourselves by whom it is that the offence cometh; for woe unto the man by whom the offence cometh; it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the depth of the sea, than that he should prove a hindrance to one of these little ones. And, again, "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth." Let us not, in our lawful love for God's ordinances, forget that they were appointed by Him to do a certain work—a means

to an end, not that end itself. Let us love, cherish, and revere them, then they will be living ordinances, not dead forms; but if through our unfaithfulness they lose their life, if instead of their being channels of divine grace they become stumbling-blocks in the path of the little ones, and God see fit for a time to pass them by, and act without them, let us beware how we fight against Him in contemning and resisting what may be a God-appointed means to the restoration and cleansing of the order of His Church. That, my brethren, would be an offence—a terrible offence, for which some day we shall have to give account. Let us in these difficult times walk warily, looking ever upward to the God of Light and Love, asking His counsel in every difficulty, seeking His glory in all, and above all things waiting in patient and confident hope for that most glorious and blessed day when He shall descend with a shout to call His own, and His first-fruits shall be gathered to Him in the air, the quick and the dead together. Let us so be found—watching and waiting and hoping not warring and fighting with each other, rending the unity of His Church, but with our hearts and hopes firmly fixed above, ready in heart and soul and spirit, as faithful servants, waiting for the coming of their Lord.'

There was much excitement at the Red Dragon that night, when the village wits were gathered in the parlour together, to know what was meant by the sermon, and whether it had been an attack upon or a defence of the Methodists. Redcap, the coachman of Rookwood, reported that madam was hugely incensed, and had sent word for Mr. Latham to come instantly to her; but that he had been engaged in teaching a class of hobbledohoy lads at his own quarters, and had sent a message of respectful excuse, which had farther enraged her. The squire, on the other hand, had said it was a fine sermon, and that he would not have the parson bullied for having preached it; whilst Mrs. Irene had called it beautiful, and had openly expressed her opinion that it was a great pity, and seemed quite wrong to talk as if





Methodists were enemies. It would be much better to forget that they differed about some things, and remember only that they all loved the same Lord.

But this way of looking at the question was as incomprehensible to the village folks as it appeared to be to madam herself. To them the Established Church of the land was one thing, and Methodism, now just taking form as a Society of itself, another, and the two of necessity opposed the one to the other.

'It were ten thousand pities as parson didn't stop short when he'd got half-way,' said Glegg, shaking his head over his pint of beer, and drawing the long clay reflectively from his lips. 'It were a fine sermon up to that. Why, when he spoke of them men as the ground swallowed up, and the fire came down and burnt up, I made sure he was a-goin' on to say as that same thing was sure to happen one of these days to them Methodists. He missed a point there—that he did. He might have called down judgment upon them then and there.'

'But the judgment wouldn't have come,' broke in Tom, who was listening with attention to all that passed, but whose blunt common-sense could not quite swallow Glegg's bombastic words; albeit the old man was looked upon in the light of a great theologian, principally from the fact that he pretty well knew the psalter by heart.

The sexton waved his hand with a lofty air of contempt.

'Young man, a sermon is a sermon, and a sermon wants its points. It don't matter whether they come true or no. I doubt if we ever expect a sermon to be true; but it wants to have its points. I say as parson missed a point there. It's them points as all folks say makes that Methodist Whitefield such a powerful man. Why, I've heard tell as he makes folks almost see the fire coming down from heaven to burn up the chaff; and if parson had known what a sermon should be, he'd have persuaded folks in Sax that the Methodists would be all burnt up like Korah and his

company. That would have been a point, a real point, and would likely have scared away all the silly women of the place from running to hear these preachers, as they like enough will do now. Women are silly; it calls them "silly women" in the Bible, and we all know as St. Paul didn't have no opinion of them at all. We shall have our women folk all running off to hear Mr. Whitefield when he comes, and folks say he won't be long now. Now, if parson had but known how to make a point, he'd have so skeered them so that not one of them would have dared to go anigh him.'

'Is Mr. Whitefield coming?' asked Tom eagerly—he scarce knew why he felt that sudden throb within him as he heard the news.

'Ay, so folks say. In their canting way they say that there has been a door opened to them amongst those low collier fellows round Hownston. Them new notions is always took up by women, and the worst kind of men; poor ignorant things who know no better, though some of them might, having had advantages. Now there's my own wife: I can instruct her all she needs; but only last night she said as she had a kind of a fancy to hear Mr. Whitefield herself, if he came this way. It don't surprise me that the first woman was so easy persuaded by the serpent. Why, bless you, they're that full of perversity and curiosity, as there's no taking them no-how.'

Once get Glegg on the subject of his wife, and there was no stopping him; the younger spirits of the place therefore left him to his especial cronies, and gathered together about Tom. Of the merits of the sermon, or of the respective merits of the Established Church *versus* so-called new opinions, they knew nothing and cared less. All they knew was that they had a hero in Tom, who would 'stick at nothing,' and who would be ready for any act of daring devilry that could be devised. He was flushed with drink, elated by the adulation of his comrades, bitterly angry with himself for being haunted with feelings which were incom-

prehensible, and seemed utterly without cause. It was easy to goad him on to promise anything, and before the meeting broke up that night it was fully understood that if any Methodist preacher, even though it were Mr. Whitefield himself, dared to approach Sax, he should receive such a welcome from its hero as should effectually prevent him from repeating the experiment.

CHAPTER VII.

AT HOWNSTON RECTORY.

‘**M**ARY, this is delightful ; it is like old times to have you here again. We are all looking forward to your visit. I want most particularly to talk to you. Have you heard that Irene is coming to join us to-morrow ?’

‘Yes ; I saw her not long since, and she told me she was to pay you a visit. She seemed very much pleased about it. Methinks that of late she has been something over-pensive and grave ; but I have not been able to divine the cause. Do you know it, Athol ?’

Athol and Mary were sitting together in a spacious yew arbour at the far end of the rectory garden. The rectory was a home-like mansion of warm red-brick, and was pleasantly placed just upon the outskirts of the town, and about five minutes’ walk from the church. It was shut in from the outer world by high walls, draped with ivy, at the foot of which grew tall white lilies, and in due course a succession of handsome old-fashioned flowers blossomed out against the glossy background—golden sunflowers, many-coloured hollyhocks, blue delphinium, and the graceful columbine. The garden was Athol’s special domain, and in the summer the bulk of her time was spent here. Mary was almost as much addicted to an open-air life, and many confidences had been exchanged before now in that pleasant arbour.

‘In sooth, Mary, it is about this very thing that I most wish to speak,’ said Athol ; ‘it is not very long that I have

known it myself, and ever since it came to my ears I have longed to take counsel with you, but until I could have you to myself there seemed no opportunity of mootng the matter.'

'Then there is something going on of which I am ignorant? Yet Irene is not wont to be backward in speaking her mind to me.'

'I doubt me much,' returned Athol, 'if our sweet Irene knows the meaning of what is in store for her. She may have heard hints dropped which trouble her; but I doubt it be more than that.'

'And what, then, is this matter?' asked Mary with interest.

'Why, none other than that of her marriage,' answered Athol; 'it seems, though I scarce knew it before, that my fair cousin will be mistress of a pretty fortune when she reaches years of discretion. When madam's sister, after whom she was named, died some six years back, she left her wealth to Irene, and this lying idle all these years has come to a pretty penny. And now that she has passed her nineteenth birthday, and is not far from coming into her inheritance, madam is beginning to think of marrying her to a suitable husband, and it seems that my young Lord Lovel of Wilton Abbots is the man upon whom their choice has fallen.'

Mary's eyes opened wide in surprise.

'But hath Irene ever seen this young lord? I have never heard his name pass her lips, though I have heard it from other quarters,' and Mary looked so exceedingly grave that Athol laughed lightly.

'Ay, you have heard little good of it, I warrant. My Lord Lovel is a gay young spark, and is spending his money something too freely since he came into the property. But, notwithstanding that, good Mary, he is a very proper youth, as handsome as a young Apollo, with the bluest eyes and the sweetest smile. Why, when George brought him here

one day I could have found it in my heart to fall in love with him myself, had I not but just plighted my troth to my good cousin Fulk, so that he came just too late to make another conquest of poor me,' and Athol laughed once more right merrily.

But Mary's face was still grave. These subjects were to her something too serious for idle jesting; and her companion, seeing the look upon her face, and remembering the tragic story of her young love, suddenly quieted down and spoke more seriously again,—

'I prithee pardon my levity, good Mary. I mean no hurt by these jests. But listen farther, and I will tell all. Although Irene has not to her knowledge seen Lord Lovel, he has seen her more than once, and is greatly taken by her rare beauty. The Dowager Lady Lovel and madam have been putting their heads together, and already he has made formal application to be permitted to pay his addresses. Now comes in my plot and plan. We all know what madam is like—any day she may call her daughter to her and tell her that Lord Lovel is coming to woo her, and that she is to return a gracious answer to his suit. She thinks her child is as wax in her hands, and that she has only to command to be obeyed. But methinks you and I know Irene something better. There is a large spice of the Fortescues' strength of will in her composition, to say nothing of the silky stubbornness of madam herself. I misdoubt me much that she will love or marry to order, and therefore I have arranged this plot to try and smooth her way.'

'What plot?' asked Mary with interest.

'Why, listen, and I will tell you. Irene comes to us to-morrow, and in the course of the week George will ride hither from York—nay, frown not, Mary; he will not be more than the passing guest of a night—and with him will come a friend, whom we will call by some other name than Lord Lovel. His winning ways and handsome face will make, I doubt not, a deep impression upon our timid

woodland flower, if she can but meet him without fear and prejudice. Then when he comes again in the guise of lover, she will find it none so hard to yield him the hand and heart that have been already all but promised in her name.'

Mary smiled a little as she heard this plan, so characteristic of the romance-loving Athol; but she knew enough of Irene's position at home to be glad enough that her way should be smoothed as far as might be possible. The fashion of marrying off daughters almost at the bidding of the parents had not yet become obsolete, and neither the squire nor his lady were likely to heed the plaint of a daughter whom they regarded almost as a child, when a brilliant future seemed looming before her. If Lord Lovel were the husband selected for her, it would certainly be a great saving of pain if she could learn to like him before he was presented as an almost accepted suitor; and none knew better than Mary that Irene, with all her outward submissive gentleness, was imbued with a very decided will of her own, and a tenacity of purpose which she seemed to have inherited from both parents. She might be led, but she never would be driven—at least not beyond a certain point.

Next day Irene herself arrived, and was affectionately welcomed by her two girl friends, and with cordiality by the rector and his sister. Miss Fortescue was rather a character herself. She had kept house for her brother ever since the death of his wife, now more than twelve years ago, and she was a greater power in the parish than he, and if somewhat feared by the ne'er-do-wells, greatly respected by all sober and decent folks. The fashion of modern district visiting, mothers' meetings, Sunday Schools, and parochial guilds was then unknown; but Miss Fortescue—Mrs. Bridget, as it was the fashion of the day to call her—was something of a pioneer in these matters, and had a certain organisation of her own which was considered a decided innovation, though she was by no means unpopular on account of her eccentricities. She was acquainted with almost every man,

woman, and child in the parish. She had worried the men into depositing in her hands a certain portion of their wages during the busy summer months, so that they might feel the pinch of the winter season less bitterly when it came. She had taught the better disposed amongst the women to be clean and thrifty in their homes, and had put down many vices which once stalked unreprieved, by the sharpness of her tongue and her resolute determination to get her own way.

In addition to her energetic labours in the parish, Miss Fortescue was most hospitably inclined towards those of her own standing in life, and the rectory was the centre of much pleasant hospitality and social festivity. Athol was herself a magnet, drawing many to the house, and the rector was universally popular. The very day that Irene arrived there was a little gathering of friends to sip tea and play cards in the rector's pleasant drawing-room; and the girl had scarce exchanged greetings with her relatives before Athol carried her off to change her riding suit for something more appropriate to the occasion. There was just the possibility that Lord Lovel might put in an appearance—he was so often backwards and forwards on his way betwixt Wilton Abbots and York, where the regiment was quartered—and it certainly behoved that his lady-love should produce upon him the same impression which, it was hoped, he would produce on her.

A maid, whom Irene had brought with her, was in the room unpacking the bulky saddle-bags which contained her mistress's wardrobe. Athol looked critically at the gowns as they were drawn out, and then began to laugh a little.

'Sure, sweet coz, you have brought something besides these dim, Quaker-like garments? Why, there is scarcely one that I would be seen abroad in! Where are all your pretty costly robes of silk and lace?'

The swift colour mounted to Irene's face as she answered gravely,—

‘Dear cousin, I like these plain garments better. I love not to bedizen myself so finely when there be so many poor creatures lacking bread, nor to flaunt about like a peacock when we are bidden to walk soberly, and to let our adornment be that of the heart and spirit.’

Athol suddenly raised her head and gazed with curiosity upon Irene.

‘Why, child, hast turned Methodist?’ she asked quickly.

Irene’s face was in a glow, but she spoke quietly enough,—

‘Nay, I have turned nothing; I only strive to do what is right, and walk after the pattern laid down in our Bible. Is there aught of harm in that, Athol?’

‘Nay, ask me not; I am none of your theologians and choppers of logic. I only know that these mad Methodists teach that all we who adorn ourselves as our station in life warrants—nay, demands—are walking straight into hell; and that only the other day the two daughters of our good doctor called to see us, dressed like veritable Quakers. I knew not what to make of it, but they said they had been hearing Mr. Whitefield and Mr. Wesley preach in this place and the other, and that they were assured that they had the truth. So that, though they used to go so gay, and though their mother greatly grieves over their stiff-necked obstinacy about it, they will persist in going about so as to draw all eyes upon them. They began to rail against my new habit which father gave me—pale blue taffeta, embroidered in white silk and laced with silver—you must see it one of these days; but Aunt Bridget came down upon them then in her quick way, and they were glad enough to slink off with their tails between their legs—as we say of whipped dogs.’

‘What did aunt say?’ asked Irene, with heightened colour.

‘Oh, just a few of her quick, sharp, common-sense sayings. She told them that it was a strange creed that taught folks that God could only save those who wore

certain colours on their backs, and that His grace was held off by a few golden ornaments or a stylish robe. She said that at that rate the devil was a far greater lord than He, for he could get into a sad-coloured garment as well as a gay one, and teach young folks disobedience to the wishes of parents, which the law and the gospel alike condemned. She said that she had always believed that God looked upon the heart and soul, and judged His children by their love and faith and zeal; but that, of course, if He went by the outward dress, the tailors and sempstresses would have a deal to answer for, as they would be the keepers of the gates of the world to come.'

Irene shrank back a little, but only said quietly,—

'I do not think Aunt Bridget quite understands. Is it not true that gay apparel often takes up too much of our time, our thought, our money?'

But Athol put up her hands to her ears, laughing.

'Sweet coz, spare me! Do I not hear only too much argument and disputing, which, since these Methodists have been disturbing the peace of our land, seem never to cease from day to day and week to week? Let us at least agree to differ, and not to argue and prate. I was never meant to be a theologian. If you must talk, pray talk to Aunt Bridget, or to our grave Mary here.'

'But I do not want to talk,' answered Irene, very decidedly; 'I only want leave to think for myself.'

However, when the pale grey robe was donned, Irene looked so fair and pure and innocent, that Athol pronounced herself content, though she insisted on pinning a bunch of blush roses upon one shoulder, thus giving the touch of colour which was needed for artistic effect.

The evening passed pleasantly away, and so did the days following. The girls spent most of their time together in the pleasant garden or riding out, sometimes attended by a servant, or with the rector; and although it was tolerably evident that some change had passed over Irene—though she

was graver than her wont, more prone to solitary musing and reading, more decided in some of her words and ways—nothing like an argument was ever provoked, and Athol made much of her, and tried to coax her into the high spirits natural to herself, hoping day by day that the lover would appear, and that the conquest on both sides would be mutual.

In time the meeting was achieved, but with scarcely the result hoped and planned. George Fortescue wrote word that he and his friend would be with them on Sunday at some hour in the afternoon ; and punctual to the moment the young men made their appearance. Both were in semi-military dress, the bravery of which was well set off by the handsome faces and figures of the young officers. Mary looked with great interest at Lord Lovel, and certainly could not deny that there was much beauty in the smooth boyish face, framed in the golden hair which grew so abundantly, and curled of itself so naturally, that there was no need to conceal it by any false wig. The winning charm of which Athol had spoken was easily perceived, and was not without some slight effect upon Irene at the moment of introduction ; yet Mary's clear-seeing eyes detected traces even in that youthful countenance of what would now be termed hard-living. Soft and gentle as was his voice and polished his manner, the fashionable oaths and expletives dropped freely from his lips ; and although this manner of speaking was too common to excite remark even from ladies, it always pained Mary to hear it ; and now it was evident that Irene shrank from the sound of words that she had heard of old without heeding their significance.

Lord Lovel took the seat beside Irene, and strove to better the acquaintance. She was a Fortescue—the daughter of madam, of whose fame he had heard ; and he thought he should find it an easy task to win her good graces.

‘Sweet mistress, we should have been here before, but were let by a piece of sport as rare as any I have ever

witnessed. As we rode hither across the country we chanced, not many miles from here, upon one of those mad fellows they call Methodists, perched precariously upon a table beneath an oak, holding forth his wild doctrines to a congregation of many hundreds. Hard by we had seen some honest fellows baiting a bull; so back we turned and bid them drive the infuriated animal amongst this congregation and straight up to the preacher. I would, fair lady, you could have been there to see the sport. We on our horses had the most excellent view, and were of no small service in driving the beast straight upon the table, which was promptly overturned, landing the madman sprawling on the ground, his faithful flock rushing screaming hither and thither, charged first one way and then another by the bewildered and furious beast. I would have gone a day's journey any time to see such sport.'

'Was the good man hurt?' asked Irene breathlessly.

'Nay, I know not; he may be killed for aught I care,' was the negligent answer; 'if not, it may teach him a lesson that he will do well to take to heart. I have no patience with these meddling fools; I would we had a bull or a bear for each one of them.'

'Are you then a heathen and a pagan, sir,' asked Irene, with a sudden flash in her eye, 'that you would strive to do to death every godly man who comes to speak salvation to lost souls?'

The young man was so astonished that he could only gaze at the lady as one might gaze at some shy wild bird which had suddenly flown in one's face with intent to attack. He appeared to have no words ready, but Miss Fortescue came quickly to the rescue of the mutually embarrassed couple by saying, in her quick way,—

'No wrangling, niece, in my parlour, if you please; and you, young sir, have a care to your words, for I like not these godless doings on the Lord's day, though I hold not with these innovations and new-fangled ways of doing good.



If folks would not make such a rout about these open-air preachings, it would be better for every one. It is no new doctrine the leaders of the Methodists teach. They are ordained clergy, every one of them ; and if we had lent them our pulpits more freely, we might have been saved much trouble.'

'Surely, madam, you hold not with them?' said Lord Lovel.

'Hold with them? No. I hold that they talk a vast deal of nonsense, and, for my part, I like not a creed which scares folks almost to madness, and throws poor little children into fits and convulsions of agony, fearing the terrors of hell, into which these good men will have it everybody must fall who is not instantly converted, as they term it, in a moment of time. So people say of them. I don't find that kind of doctrine in my Bible. Folks were mighty slow to come to our Lord when He was in the very midst of them, and I don't see that we can expect them to be more forward now. But then, with all the nonsense they add of themselves, they speak sound sense and sound theology too, if one does but take the trouble to sift it. So no more preacher-baiting with wild bulls for me, if you please, young sir. You won't find that line of conduct upheld in your Bible ; and those who wish to pose as champions of the Church would do well to study that Book as thoroughly as the despised Methodists do. Will it please you to lead my niece into the parlour, and we will have a dish of tea to refresh us?'

This was Mrs. Bridget's way of intimating that the discussion was at an end ; and Irene, who had turned pale and red alternately as her aunt had been speaking, was forced to admit that she was right in closing debate at this point. It might be cowardly to be glad thus to be spared speaking out boldly for what she held to be the truth, but glad she undoubtedly was ; and young Lord Lovel, who was not deficient in tact, and felt that he had made but a

poor start in his courtship, was thankful enough to drop the vexed question of the Methodist revival, and launch out upon more congenial themes.

But even here he found Irene less responsive than he felt he had a right to expect. She had not seen the last new play in York; and when he hoped that he would have the happiness of seeing her at the theatre one of these days, she shrank back slightly and said she thought not. She had no wish at all to witness any play, not even though David Garrick himself should come, as was talked of, to display his powers there. Neither could he arouse her to any interest in the ball shortly to be held in the city, in honour of the victory over the Pretender at Culloden early in the year. Irene professed no desire to be present, rather the reverse, and was gently rallied for disloyalty to the king shown by this indifference.

'It is said that no Methodist will be present,' lightly remarked Lord Lovel; 'and that is, to my thinking, a plain enough proof that what we say of them is true, and that they are all more or less papists in disguise, bound together to do all they can to stir up rebellion, and in the end bring back the Jacobite princes. They begin by stirring up strife and rebellion at home, setting children against parents, and servants against their masters. It will all pave the way for the greater rebellion. So be careful, sweet mistress, how you appear to disdain our festivities. For men will say of you that you are a little papist in disguise too—or a Methodist—which comes to much the same thing.'

Irene's face was crimson, but she made no response, and the talk once more drifted away. The evening sped on in pleasant and easy fashion. Athol played upon the harpsichord, and Mary sang one of Mr. Handel's airs from his new oratorio.

When the girls went to bed together soon after half-past nine o'clock, Athol followed Irene into her room and gently and playfully rallied her upon the marked attentions

paid to her by her fascinating 'beau.' But Irene was for once not as easy to deal with as was her wont. Her gentle face flushed hotly, and she cried with unwonted impatience,—

'Speak not to me of him! I would I might never see him more!'

'Sweet coz, why such heat? Is he not a likely youth?'

'I know not aught of that. He may be one after your heart, Athol; but I mislike and I mistrust him sorely. I am sure and certain that he is not a good man.'

Athol went away with a grave face, and as she closed her own door upon herself she whispered,—

'What has come over the child of late? I never knew it thus with her before.'

CHAPTER VIII.

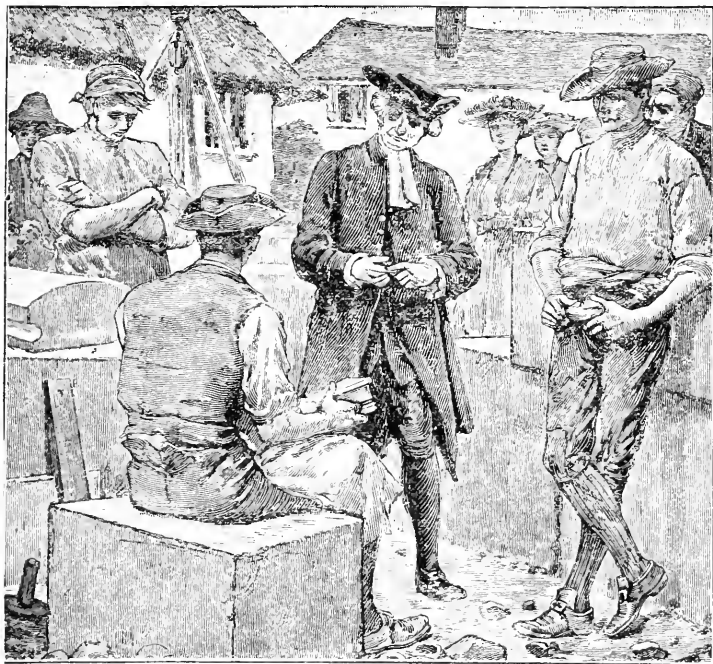
THE GREAT PREACHER.

NELSON, the preacher and stone-mason, was working by day in a marble-worker's yard in Hownston, giving his evening hours and his Sundays to the instruction of such as chose to come to him privately, or to gather at selected spots to hear him preach. His discourses were generally delivered in the pit-village beyond the town, where he was eagerly listened to by the sooty colliers. There was no preaching in the market-place upon the Sunday which was spent by Mary and Irene at the rectory; and it was plain to all who knew her that Irene was distinctly disappointed at this, as she had set her heart on hearing the man.

Both Athol and Mary, though from different causes, were a little uneasy about their companion just now. Irene had always been silent and reserved to the world, but never before had she shut herself up from Mary's sympathy, as she appeared to be doing now. That she had something upon her mind no one could doubt. She could scarce be persuaded to stir abroad, and spent long hours shut up in her room declining any manner of companionship. She resolutely refused to accept any of the invitations issued to her by friends, and quite affronted her aunt by her unwonted persistence, which in those days was very unusual in the young, when their elders had expressed a wish as to their movements. Athol's tact and good nature tided over many little difficulties, but in secret she would shrug her shoulders, and lament to Mary that her cousin was turning Methodist as fast as she could, wondering how she had got hold of the

notion, and who could be keeping her instructed in all the phases of the new craze.

When, however, Athol declared one day that she meant to visit the marble-yard, and have herself a look at the stone-mason, and perhaps exchange a word or two with him, Irene



suddenly brightened up, and asked leave to be of the party. Miss Fortescue had some business to transact with the master-mason with regard to some family tombstones and tablets, and she made no objection when she heard that the three girls all desired to accompany her. Mrs. Bridget was a large-minded woman, and did not regard these poor preachers as monsters, although she sometimes felt an

orthodox and not altogether unreasonable distrust of some of their teaching. She was not without curiosity herself with regard to the man of whom she had heard so much, and when the ladies entered the yard at the hour when the men had just paused from their task to eat their dinner, it was very easy to see which amongst them was the preacher, for one or two persons had gathered round him, and he was speaking to them and answering their questions, Bible in hand. His dinner-hour was generally spent in this fashion, his habits being most ascetic and abstemious.

One of the persons standing round the stone-mason was a gentleman in clerical garb, whose face was not unknown to Athol and her aunt. It was he who was doing the chief part of the speaking; and as the ladies approached the rougher men moved away, sitting down to their own meal, and leaving Nelson to finish his argument with the parson in peace. Mrs. Bridget moved across to the building to do her errand, but the three girls lingered within ear-shot of the preacher, listening to what he was saying.

It was the clergyman who was speaking when they stopped first. 'Yes, yes,' he said, 'I know your doctrine, for I have heard you preach, but I do not like you; you lay a wrong foundation for salvation. Do you think that the blood of another man will save me?'

'Sir, St. Paul saith, "Other foundation can no man lay but Jesus Christ"; but you say that is a wrong foundation. Upon what terms do you expect to be saved?'

'By good works.'

'Then, sir, you will be the first that goes to heaven that way. But suppose you did get there, what would you do then?'

'Why, what do others do there?'

'They sing, "Glory to God that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever, that was slain and hath redeemed us by His blood." But your song will be, "Glory be to myself; for I have quickened my own soul, and qualified myself for

heaven!" Oh, sir, what a scandalous song that will be! it will make a discord in heaven.'

The clergyman frowned and stood looking thoughtfully upon the ground, after which he said quietly,—

'My good man, all the Lord requires of us is to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.'

'Do you expect to stand or fall by that Scripture?'

'I do.'

'Then, sir, you are lost for ever. I appeal to your conscience, if you have so walked, doing perfect justice to all men, offending none, using perfect mercy to all, using house, wealth, lands, all for the glory of God. If you have used any one talent not to the glory of God, you have robbed Him.'

'But there is repentance,' he said quickly.

'Not for you; for you are to be saved for doing justly, for loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. If you come short of these duties you must be damned.'

'Why, man, if this is your doctrine,' exclaimed the clergyman, 'no wonder men are driven to despair!'

'Ay, sir, of despair of saving themselves, that they may come to Christ to be saved.'

By this time several idlers had come into the yard, partly no doubt to see something of the mason and hear his words. The girls moved away out of the little group. Irene's eyes were shining strangely; but upon Athol's face there was a look akin to contempt and restive impatience.

'Certainly he does not lack for impudent assurance,' she said.

'Oh, Athol!' cried Irene, with unwonted heat, 'he spoke only words of truth. He is a holy man; one of the saints of God.'

'Then preserve me henceforth from all such saints!' cried Athol flippantly; 'for their mission in life seems to be to damn the whole world but their few selves.'

'No; only those who will not trust in the Crucified Saviour; and what does the Church teach but that?'

Athol put her hands to her ears, begging for mercy. She had had enough ; then, turning to Mary, she asked to know her view of Nelson's doctrine. Mary smiled a little, and her words were thoughtfully spoken.

'I should better have liked it had he answered somewhat differently ; had he pointed out that good works, acts of mercy and justice, and a humble walk with God, are the natural outcome of faith in Christ, and are not to be spoken of with scorn, albeit the faith must come first. Faith, and faith by itself, will save our souls—no Christian can doubt that ; but are we who bear Christ's holy Name to be content with that ? Methinks, sometimes, these good men, in their zeal to save the souls of men, are somewhat prone—unconsciously to themselves—to make them think that that is all that is demanded of them. But how much do we hear of growth in grace, of the perfecting of the saints, of the fruits of the Spirit ? The Scripture is full of such words. True, Mr. Wesley speaks much of a "sinless perfection,"—but rather, or so I have heard, as if it were to be a thing at once attained upon accepting in faith the atoning Blood of Christ. To me it seems as though no holiness may be obtained save through a constant and earnest struggle, and a slow growth in the grace of God ; the going on unto perfection, which is the aim and object of the Christian warfare, but which must be the ceaseless struggle of a lifetime, and may never be attained to fully whilst we wear the garment of the frail flesh.'

'I like better,' said Irene, very softly, 'to feel that Christ has done all for me ; to trust everything to Him ; to look to Him alone, and to my own sinful deeds in no whit for justification.'

'I too would look ever to Christ as the one Atoner, the one Reconciler ; but I would show my love and my faith by striving to do His will. The same Spirit inspired the words, "Faith without works is dead," as inspired the teachings upon faith to which we cling. I think it is just this : God's

ways are very wide, are very full of blessings, very full of promises. We must strive to take all His words, all His ways, and see how the same Spirit breathes and lives in all. Instead of telling those who think not quite as we do that they are wrong—that they will be damned—let us examine and see if they are not holding some portion of the same truth as guides us, and try to show them how truths which may seem to be opposed the one to the other are yet only parts of a great whole. If men would but strive to weld together, instead of tearing and rending, how different the world and its outlook would be !'

Athol laughed carelessly.

'I think it's more amusing when they go down each other's throats. I am glad I have heard Nelson teach openly that men will be eternally damned for striving to be just and merciful and walking humbly with God. I shall have less compunction when I hear of the baiting of the preachers, which did seem, perhaps, carrying things too far. I shall know, in future, that they richly deserve what they get. I have no patience with such narrow-minded bigotry.'

Athol's frank words were but the echo of what was being spoken and thought all over the neighbourhood just at this juncture. Hownston and Sax, which had hitherto been passed by during the revival times, had now become involved in the general vortex of changing and aroused thought, and the disturbance affected all sections of the people.

The excitement was intensified by the approaching visit of the great preacher, Whitefield, who, it was said, was coming north very shortly, and would preach a sermon upon the common, half-way between Hownston and the village of Sax, upon a certain day ; hoping thus to be the means of drawing numbers to hear him who had never had the opportunity before, and of paving the way for the more organised working of the society which followed upon first arousings.

Sax was all in a tumult. Sleepy and easy-going by habit, its people had been aroused to an unwonted excitement of

late. Madam's known and pronounced hatred to Methodism, Mr. Latham's sermon, Tom Heron's exploit at Hownston, had all contributed in various degrees to awaken public interest; and now little was talked of in the place but the coming of Whitefield, and speculation as to who would go to hear him, and whether those who did so would stand in peril of madam's displeasure. To offend madam was no light thing in Sax. True, the squire was master, and was a just and kind-hearted man, who might be trusted to stand between his tenants and their offended lady to a certain extent. He would scarcely be likely to eject from their homes persons who had been tempted to go and hear the great preacher. At the same time it was whispered abroad that madam was absolutely resolved to have no Methodists or dissenters of any kind in Sax; and that if any of those persons who went to the preaching embraced the 'new doctrine,' she would use her influence with her husband to the very uttermost to get those persons ejected from the estate. And there was a feeling that what madam purposed to do she generally contrived to accomplish, however unlikely success appeared at the outset.

Tom had returned to his work at the forge, after an interval spent in wild dissipation, in which he had flattered himself that awakening conscience had been finally laid to rest. His uncle had received him with the silent gravity to which he was well used. Samson had long ceased to reason with or rebuke his lawless nephew. All he was able to do was to keep his place at the forge always open for him when he came back after one of his outbreaks, and to give him ample employment for his iron thews and sinews when he was in the humour for work. Owing to this reticence, he had never estranged himself from the wild youth; and such feeling as Tom bore his uncle was of friendly good-will and respect.

Samson Heron, though he had roundly rebuked Luke Crowder for preaching violence against the Methodists, was

a staunch churchman, and a most regular attendant at all the Sunday services. He had little to say about the revival, save that he did not hold with new-fangled ideas, and that they of Sax who had Mr. Latham to teach them had no need to go wandering over the country in search of doctrines that seemed to throw folks into fits and convulsions, and make them fitter for the madhouse than for their own homes. Glegg, the clerk and sexton, hobbled up to the forge many times in the course of the week to exchange opinions with the blacksmith; and it was he who brought the news at last that the day and hour of Whitefield's preaching had actually been fixed.

'He be a-cooming, Samson,' said the little man, leaning over the door, and nodding to the two Herons, who were at work within the forge. 'He be a-cooming next week, and holds his preaching at four o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. I've bin thinking of it over, neighbour, about going myself to hear him. It goes agin the grain of me, as one might say; but, again, if all the women folk go off, as like they will, and come home with a pack of tales in their mouths, each one longer than the last—why, one might wish one had bin there oneself, only to be able to show them up for silly fools to believe such a pack o' rubbish. What do you think about it, Samson? You and I shan't get no harm; we know a deal too much to be led away by fine words.'

'Well, I hadn't no thought of going myself,' answered Samson. 'I say as Mr. Latham is a good enough preacher for me, and I like my sermons decent-like in a church on Sunday; but I'm none so set against any man if he tries to do good. Be'st going thyself, neighbour?'

'My wife's a-going,' answered Glegg; 'I knowed she would. I've told her till I'm tired o' telling, that it's not for women to go gadding off after new doctrine. If a woman don't understand a thing she's to ask her husband at home—St. Paul says so his own self; and my missis has peculiar

advantages, as one might say, having a husband who does understand sound doctrine. But, bless you ! she don't care for St. Paul no more nor she does for me. She'll go, and I think I'd better go too, else she'll come home with such tales as'll make me long to take the rod to her. I shan't tell her I'm going ; but I thought as you and I might go quiet-like together, and hear it for ourselves. If my missis should be taken with a fit, as like enough she may, being that foolish and easy led, it 'ud be a good thing for me to be handy there. I think she'd come to her senses quicker if she was to hear my voice a-speaking to her.'

Samson rubbed his chin reflectively, whilst Tom stood with his hammer in his hand, listening to every word, a gleam in his eyes that might betoken either interest or ferocity.

'Well, I've no women folk to go after, and I don't care much about it. But trade'll be slack that afternoon, I doubt not, so I'll go with thee, if thee wishes. They say he's a man to hear, and that he's a clergyman too, though he don't seem much like one. Tom lad, thee's let the fire out, but never mind to-night. Thee can go home now. We've done our day's work.'

Tom threw down his hammer and departed. He knew that his uncle seldom cared to talk of religion in any form before him, fearing an outbreak of blasphemous vituperation such as was only too common with him. He was too well used to being looked upon as the black sheep of the parish to heed much what was thought of him ; but somehow to-day the dismissal seemed to sting him. He was interested in what the two men were saying ; he could not help being interested in what was so exciting the village mind. Besides, had not some of his comrades resolved to get up a regular attack upon any travelling preacher who should visit these parts ? He wanted to know all he could upon the matter.

But he was too proud to stay after being sent away, and he strode off to his own miserable home. His mother had

been of late more riotous and drunken than ever. Had it not been that the revival question was occupying all minds, it is likely there might have come a remonstrance from the great house, and a warning that she must either behave more decently or leave the cottage. Jenny Heron had received such warnings before. Probably, had it not been for the respect in which Samson was held, and the favour shown to Tom by the young men of the Fortescue family, the woman would have been turned away from the place long ago.

She was out when Tom came in, but blind Molly stood in the doorway, her sightless eyes lit up with eager expectation; and as soon as she heard the familiar step swinging along the road, she ran forward in the uncertain fashion of the blind, and holding out her hand, cried eagerly,—

‘Tom, Tom, be that thee? Oh, Tom, I have wanted thee so badly. Tom, hast heard the news in all folks’ mouths? Mr. Whitefield is coming; he is coming very soon. Oh, Tom, I do so long to hear him! Will thee take me to hear him when he does? Mother says as she shall go, but I daren’t go with her. She forgets me; happen she might leave me in the crowd; but with thee I would feel safe. Oh, Tom, dear Tom, I do so want to go. Please say that thou wilt let me go with thee!’

Tom hesitated and looked considerably taken aback. True, he had had some thoughts of being present himself, but rather with a view of creating a disturbance, as on another occasion. His comrades would expect it of him, and he was partially pledged. All the same, there came over him at moments qualms of distaste and disgust at himself. He was none so proud of the first attempt in that line, which had won him glory in Sax, and had caused even madam to smile upon him as she rolled past one day in her grand carriage. He had heard of riots in other places where it had seemed to him that the men assaulted had come off better than their adversaries; and Tom was able to appreciate a moral

victory, even where force had appeared for the moment to triumph. He knew that Nelson had had the best of it in Hownston that Sunday afternoon. What if he were to instigate a futile attack upon Mr. Whitefield, and become a laughing-stock instead of a hero? Whitefield's congregation would muster by thousands. Would the thousands who had assembled to hear him speak submit to have him silenced by a handful of village bullies? Probably not, although they might by no means number themselves as his followers. Tom did not care to be baulked of anything attempted; neither did he wish to forego the sermon, being conscious of a great curiosity where these Methodists were concerned. Perhaps Molly's eager request would suffice to help him out of a difficulty. If he took her, he could not be expected to leave her in the crowd to fight the preacher. His kindness to the blind child was sufficiently known to explain his presence at the sermon if she had begged to be taken. On the whole, Tom decided that to go as Molly's escort would be the best possible thing for him; and at last, upon the day appointed, he stood as one of a vast, packed crowd, listening in dead silence to the trumpet-like voice of the great preacher, as it rolled over the heads of the multitude, carrying its message of peace or terror to the beating hearts in that attentive assembly.

Of Whitefield's marvellous eloquence, and his power of swaying the feelings and the minds of his hearers, too much is known to need repetition here; but such eloquence and passion came as a revelation to Tom Heron. As he stood with Molly's hand clasped fast in his, he seemed to see the great white throne set in heaven; to behold the Judge upon that throne—the Judge from whose face the earth and heavens fled away, and to see himself one of that multitude of sinners—the dead, both small and great, who were coming up one by one to hear their doom. He felt himself brought up to the Judge. He saw the Book of Life opened, and his name looked for in those pages. He seemed

to hear a voice saying, 'There is no Tom Heron in this book'; and the great drops stood upon his brow, as the preacher (who had been drawing this scene so vividly to his hearers that almost every one felt as Tom was feeling now) turned round upon the people, throwing out his hands with a most telling gesture, as he cried in terrible accents,—

'Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

At that moment a woman near at hand was seized with violent convulsions. Tom, looking over the heads of the people, saw in the distorted face the features of his own mother; and still clasping Molly's hand in his, he fought his way through the crowd, and bade those standing round bring her away quietly, where he could better see to her state. Thus it came about that neither he, nor the miserable woman whose nature he had inherited in no small measure, nor the little child eagerly seeking after truth, ever heard the great preacher's wonderful picture of the Redemption which alone can save humanity from the wrathful judgment of God. Tom went home with a sullen despair at heart; he was lost to all eternity—he knew it, and accepted it as his fate. His mother, when her convulsions subsided, and she could be transported home, lay moaning and shivering on her pallet bed, sometimes breaking out into wild shrieks, and vowing that she saw the devil coming in to carry her away. Whilst Molly crouched, sobbing and trembling, by the fire, and Samson alone dared to remain beside the unhappy woman, Tom rushed out into the summer night, vowing with all the fervour of his nature that he would never, never go near one of those terrible Methodists again. If he had to be punished eternally in the next world, at least he would get what enjoyment there was to be had in this whilst it lasted.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRISONERS AT YORK.

‘**I** TELL thee I’ll stand it no longer. I wish with all my heart every Methodist amongst them was drowned in the bottom of the sea. They come to a place and turn it into a very hell upon earth, and then they go off elsewhere to do the like there;’ and Tom Heron wound up his anathema by some terrible oaths and words of blasphemy, which made even Luke Crowder shudder as he stood.

Tom had strong motive for this sudden outburst of fury. For the past three days his mother had been stretched upon her pallet bed in the dark cottage, falling every six hours or thereabouts into a perfect frenzy of terror and agony, screaming out that the devil was about to carry her away, and shrieking for the Methodists to come and save her. Her brother-in-law Samson had been invaluable at this time, and had done something towards soothing the wild paroxysms of what appeared like demoniacal possession; but when he had sent for Mr. Latham, to see if he could be of any assistance to the poor creature, she had fallen into a worse fury than ever, raving at and cursing the clergyman and all such as he, vituperating them with every evil epithet she could call up, and bidding him begone before she tore his eyes out. Then she fell once more to crying out for some holy man, by which she meant one of the Methodist preachers; and so matters went on hour after hour and day after day, till Tom’s patience and temper were alike exhausted, and he was resolved at all costs to take himself off from his miserable home.

His uncle had once said something to him about the advisability of trying to get some one to come to his mother—one of these Methodists for whom she was always crying out ; but with a great oath Tom had declared that he would break the head of the first of them who dared to cross the threshold of his home. Moreover, it was openly announced in Sax that madam was deeply displeased at the way in which its inhabitants had flocked to hear Whitefield, and that the first of them who took any open step, either in joining themselves to the Methodists or in inviting one of them to enter the village on any pretext whatever, would be promptly ejected from his cottage, and be forced to take up his abode elsewhere.

Tom was more utterly wretched and reckless during those days than he remembered ever being in his life before. Drink, swear, and game as he would, he could not get out of his head those terrible words of doom which one day he knew must be pronounced against him, when he should rise and stand before that awful judgment throne, and be bidden to 'Depart' from the face of God. In his dreams he saw, night after night, the hot red flames from the pit rising up to devour him, and would wake in a lather of heat and terror, often to hear from the adjoining room the voice of his mother screaming out in the same hopeless, helpless terror. True, little Molly would creep sometimes to his side, and whisper that there was a way of escape out of all the darkness, misery, and terror ; but she was only a timid child, and her comprehension greatly exceeded her power of expression. She had drunk in the teaching of the lady of Ernscliff, but she was not able to reproduce it ; and though she managed to keep her serenity and faith amid these trying scenes, her witness was but the silent one of a child's faith, and produced no impression upon Tom.

He had worked like a fury at the forge all day. Samson had been frequently called off to the unhappy woman in the cottage hard by ; but Tom had done double duty, and had

felt as if he were venting some of the bitterness and wrath which he cherished against all the world as he struck with his sledge-hammer-blows the glowing iron on the anvil, and watched the showers of sparks as they flew around him. There were times when those sparks recalled the fires of hell to his ardent but untrained imagination, and he would rush from the forge into the outer air, gasping for breath, great beads of moisture standing on his brow. It was on such an occasion as this that he suddenly encountered Luke Crowder, and vented his restless trouble of spirit in wild denunciation of those whom he regarded as the main cause of all his disquietude.

'Ay, for sure they do a power of mischief,' answered the publican's son readily enough. 'Why, 'twas only yesterday as our cousin from Leeds came over to see us, and he said as the Methodists were fair ruining his trade there. He had as good a business as any one in the town once, and now these preachers go stirring up the people and skeering them with hell-fire and judgment, till they are afraid so much as to spend a sixpence with a neighbour, and do nothing but get together with their Bibles, and worry themselves half daft about saving their souls. Bless thee, Tom, if it takes such a power of trouble to get one's soul saved, I'd as lief go without one. I've no patience with such foolery.'

'It's all a pack of lies!' cried Tom, his eyes flashing ominously. 'I tell thee, Luke, I've had a deal more than I can stand. I'm pretty well desperate now. I'll go off for a bit somewhere, and let it all blow over. Maybe when I come back things will be quieter again. Trust madam to put all the foolery down as fast as it can be put.'

It was not unusual for Tom to take himself off in uncere-
monious fashion from time to time when the roving fit came upon him. Luke was by no means surprised at the announcement; he only asked where his friend thought of going.

'I don't know, and I don't care; anywhere out of the way of these accursed Methodists. Happen, I'll walk the moors

over and fill myself with air, and bathe in the lakes, and see naught of men. Happen, I'll go to sea and sail round the world; I don't know what I'll do.'

'If I was thee, I'd go to York,' said Luke Crowder; 'there'll be fine doings there next month.'

'What doings?'

'Why, don't thee know? Them Jacobite prisoners are to be executed, and it'll be a fine sight to see. Thee knows they cut them down only half dead and cuts out their false hearts, and throws them on the fire. I'd go and see that, if I were thee, Tom. There'll be a power of fine folks there, and it'll make thee forget all these mad fools have been saying.'

Tom eyes brightened. There was something of the savage in him still, and he lived in an age when it was fashionable to delight in cruel and bloody spectacles. Moreover, it was regarded as a proof of loyalty to the king to hate and hold up to reprobation the Jacobites and their cause; and it was still commonly reported, amongst the ignorant and educated alike, that the Methodists were almost to a man Jacobites in disguise. So the idea of witnessing these executions appeared to Tom to partake somewhat of the nature of an act of vengeance, and his mind was quickly made up.

'I'll go. I'm glad thee told me, Luke. Will thee come with me?'

'Nay, nay; I'm none so fond of a long tramp these muddy days,' answered Luke, who was too much wedded to the bar of his father's house of entertainment to care to stray far away. 'Thee can go, and tell us about it afterwards.'

Samson Heron made no objection when he heard that Tom was going away for a time. The autumn was upon them; work was somewhat slacker than it had been. He had noticed all through the summer how restless and wild the youth had been, and he knew it would be useless to attempt the smallest remonstrance. Tom's home was certainly a wretched place, and it might do the lad good to leave it for

a while. To Samson it certainly appeared as though there had come small good to Sax from the infusion of the Methodist element into the village.

Tom had a few adieus to pay, one of them being to the Dawsons of Sheepwold Farm. He had not been very assiduous in his attentions to Meg of late. The summer months are busy ones at a farm-house, and Janet Dawson, who worked like a trooper herself, expected her daughter to do the same. Moreover, she was by no means encouraging to Tom when he did appear. She looked upon him as a vessel of wrath; and although, from her point of view, he was hardly to be blamed for this, she was by no means sure that she approved him for her daughter, though she knew that her husband was not averse to the match. He was often heard to express it as his opinion that Tom Heron was a fine young fellow at heart, and that if he could be settled down with a good and thrifty wife in a comfortable home of his own, his friends and neighbours would scarce know him for the same when a twelvemonth had passed over his head.

Tom was received very cordially by Meg this bright autumn evening, as he strolled into the kitchen to find her alone there, laying the spotless white table for supper. The sharp tongue of the mother kept suitors and visitors alike at a distance, and it was something of an event for a neighbour to drop in to supper in a friendly way.

Tom asked after all the party, and heard for the first time with surprise that Nanny, the eldest daughter, had gone out to service.

'Why, I thought thy father would have kept her at home, he was always so fond of her; and there always seemed plenty for everybody to do up here.'

Meg looked cautiously round the kitchen, and came a step nearer.

'Don't speak of it before mother—but Nanny took up with Methodist notions. Father has got them, thee knows,

and he talked a bit to her; but the real harm, as mother calls it, was done when she went to stay with some cousins of ours not so very far away. She was there six weeks, I think, and she came back a Methodist all over. You know what mother is. Well, there was no peace in the house after that, and the end of it was that Nanny went to service. She was always handy with her needle and clever with her fingers, and she got the place of lady's maid to Mrs. Irene Fortescue, and she's with her still, and very happy, she says. Mother was glad enough to send her there. She said that in madam's house she would soon get all the nonsense knocked out of her.'

'I wonder madam would have her.'

'You see madam knows nothing about her servants herself, and the housekeeper is a friend both of father and mother. She thought well of Nanny, and told her that all she had to do was to keep her place and be quiet, and nobody would trouble her. She was glad enough to go, and there she is; and though I miss her sadly, it's better to have her gone than to have all that quarrelling and bickering—one grew fair sickened with it day after day.'

Tom's face darkened. It was the same story, he said to himself, everywhere. Wherever these Methodists went they sowed seeds of misery and discord. Houses were divided; children alienated from their parents; lives rendered utterly and hopelessly miserable, and all for some new-fangled, mystic doctrine, which only seemed to contain elements of reason whilst it was being set before the people by its own advocates. For his own part he would shake off the very dust from his feet against these men, and dismiss their words and warnings from his mind.

He had gone up to the farm with a lingering idea of returning by the field-path which led close to Ernscliff, animated by a half-formed hope that he might by chance catch a glimpse of the sweet face of Mistress Mary as he passed; but with this harder, harsher mood upon him he

resolved to abandon that hope. Janet Dawson always acted upon him as an irritant. He left her house in an embittered frame of mind. He thought that she ought to treat him differently, since he too so cordially hated her foes the Methodists. But she was just as stern and harsh in her judgment of him as before; and, as usual, he shortened his visit, and escaped in an uneasy and irritable frame of mind. He was distinctly resolved on one thing—with religion in any of its forms he would have nothing whatever to do. There was no possible means of finding out where the truth lay, and religion appeared to him little better than denunciation—every sect condemning the whole of the world, save an elect few, to eternal damnation; and he said to himself, as he swung homewards in the dewy autumnal moonlight, that if he had to perish everlastingly in the end, he would at least try to get all the amusement and pleasure out of life that it afforded.

Early upon the following morning Tom left his home, and started for a solitary ramble amongst the moors, preparatory to going to York. He took leave only of little Molly, who clung to him passionately, but did not beg him to stay. She knew that he was unhappy, and she felt herself quite unequal to the task of comforting him; but she loved him with such a loyal and faithful love that she was certain he would learn happiness some day, as she, in her simple, childish fashion, had learned it from the lips of the lady of Ernscliff.

Tom had hitherto been fond of the wild moors and their grand solitariness; but for some unknown reason he could not endure that loneliness now. He had fled away from his village because life among his comrades there seemed unendurable; and yet he found that it was still more unbearable to be face to face with silent Nature.

The early autumn tints of the north were upon the trees. The heat, which had lasted far through the summer and autumn, was giving place to a crisp sharpness that was invigorating, and yet seemed to tell of coming change and

decay. Everything reminded him of death stealing slowly, slowly onwards, veiled for a time, but ever stealthily approaching; and sometimes the horror of the thought almost drove him mad. Why had he been born into a world where only death was certain and sure? What right had God—if there were a God—to send him into the world to live there a few short and joyless years, and then to doom him to eternal misery and woe? Janet Dawson had told him he had been so doomed from all eternity, and the thought caused his heart to swell with a deep and impotent hatred against the God who had made him only to damn him. True, the Methodists, according to some, pointed out a way of escape from the eternal fire, but it appeared to Tom to be a way hopelessly closed to such as himself. He had never understood what repentance was; he knew nothing of the hope that those preachers held out. He remembered the graphic pictures drawn of hell-fire, of the white judgment throne; but the words he might once have heard of the merciful love of a dying Saviour had fallen upon deaf ears. Even had he attended, Tom would not have believed that this love could be for such as he was. He knew the evil of his life, the blackness of his heart. He had heard again and again that no sinner could approach unto God, therefore he was convinced that if there were truth in any of the doctrines preached, he was a lost soul; and in reckless hardihood he alternately strove to cast belief and memory to the winds, or to swear with many blasphemous oaths that he did not care if he did die eternally—he would make the most of the life that was his to do with as he would.

But solitude he could not stand, and very soon he found himself in the gay city of York. Just now it was gayer than ever. There had been a great ball there recently, in honour of (though long after) the victory of Culloden, and now the city was all agog to witness the execution of the criminals, who had been long incarcerated in the castle, and were to be speedily brought out to their doom.

Tom took up his quarters in an old-fashioned public-house of no very reputable character, situated in Pound Lane. He was a man who soon made friends, and as he was an excellent pugilist, understood cock-fighting and bull-baiting in all their details, and had money in his pocket more than sufficient for his needs, he rapidly became a popular character in the house ; and in days and nights of rioting and pleasure he speedily forgot the haunting uneasiness of his lonely moments, and was, as he termed it, 'himself again.'

The first batch of political prisoners was executed upon the first day in November, and the second on the Saturday following. Tom was there with his boon companions on both occasions, and witnessed the horrible scene with that stolid curiosity and sense of fascination that is so inexplicable, and yet so inseparable from human nature in its ruder phase of development. The prisoners were drawn on sledges from the castle to the Tyburn of York, and there the ceremony was carried out in all its barbarity.

Tom stood it upon the first occasion without flinching, but sometimes in the night the horror of the thing would come back upon him, and he vowed he would not go near the place again. Yet when the following Saturday arrived, and his companions took it for granted that he would make one of their party, he was ashamed to draw back, and fortified himself with strong drink for the scene he would again have to witness. 'Why should I care, when nobody else does?' he asked himself fiercely. He did not know what a powerful imagination he possessed as compared with his comrades, nor what a weapon that could become for his own distress and punishment. All the time as he moved along to the Tyburn he was saying to himself,—

'It might have been myself. I was all for fighting for him when I saw Prince Charles riding through the streets of Derby so gaily and so proud. Suppose it had been I—led out to die that death? Suppose it had been I?'

His nerves were all vibrating with emotion as he stood in

the crowd that gloomy day. Hard living and more drinking than he was accustomed to had unhinged his faculties, and rendered him the prey of every wild and fevered thought. He had come so to identify himself with the prisoners who were that day to die, as he stood shivering in the expectant crowd, that by the time the sledges appeared, and he saw upon one a tall, dark-eyed, muscular young fellow not unlike himself, he could scarce restrain a cry of horror, for he felt in very truth as if he himself were about to meet his doom.

Walking beside the black-haired prisoner was a quiet-looking, sandy-haired man, who appeared to be conversing very earnestly with the condemned. Tom, whose faculties were entirely engrossed by this one man, took note of this fact, whilst almost immediately it became known to the crowd, and a scornful hooting laugh arose.

‘There be the Methodists—at their old game—always after the prisoners! What good does he think he’ll do un now?’

And then Tom understood that the meek-looking little man was a Methodist, and that he was trying to comfort the soul of the condemned man, and to cheer him through the coming ordeal.

A strange wave as of personal gratitude swept over Tom as he stood there. He had identified himself so completely with this one prisoner that, to his over-excited imagination, it seemed as though the Methodist preacher had come to *him* in his hour of dire need. With parted lips and straining eyes he gazed upon the haggard face of the condemned, and saw it illuminated by a smile that had in it an element of triumph.

The crowd was breathlessly watching the executioner; but Tom’s eyes were immovably fixed upon this last pair. All at once he saw them move. The prisoner bent the knee and bowed his head. The other man laid a hand upon it, and his lips moved. Then he stood aside, and the young man arose, shook back his head and firmly mounted the scaffold steps. Tom saw his face more clearly than ever, and there was no fear upon it, no defiance, no sorrow. His

eyes were shining as though he had had a glimpse of something beyond. Tom gazed at him for a moment in mute amaze, and then turned his head away. A few moments of breathless silence, and then the words of the executioner,—

‘Gentlemen, behold the heart of the last traitor!’

A wild cheer answered this announcement; but Tom’s voice was silent. Shuddering and sick at heart, he pushed his way through the crowd, striving to shake off his companions, which was easy enough to do, and only pausing when he found himself in a quiet side street, away from the hideous sights and sounds which he felt would haunt him to his dying day.

‘It might have been me,’ he was saying to himself over and over again; ‘and if it had been, where should I be now?’

He could not stand still; the tumult in his mind drove him on and on. He did not know in what direction he moved, and so, perhaps, it was scarcely to be wondered at that he should find himself at last in the open space where the scaffold stood. The crowd had partially melted, but in one corner a little group had gathered, and Tom, looking vacantly round him, saw that the centre of this assembly was the small sandy-haired man who had stood beside him (so it seemed to him at least) in the hour of his direst need. Dashing his hand across his eyes to try and clear his brains, Tom drew near to listen, and as he did so he heard these words,—

‘And, oh think, my friends; think and take it home to your hearts. If the death of this poor mortal body is such a fearful and terrible thing, what will the death of the immortal soul be like?—the death that never kills—the death that never dies? Oh, hear and heed and repent, I beseech you, dear brothers; for the day will as assuredly come to you, as to our brothers who have gone from us to-day—the day and the hour of death. Take heed that ye be found walking in meekness, and faith, and righteousness, that the death of the body be not likewise the death of the soul!’

CHAPTER X.

A BRAND FROM THE BURNING.

THAT night Tom was awakened from the troubled, dream-haunted sleep into which he had fallen by a sensation of intolerable suffocation. As he opened his eyes he was conscious of a red glare upon the bare walls of his little attic chamber, and he started up with a cry of terror. It had come then at last, that fiery doom of which he had been thinking and dreaming for weeks and months past! Death had found him—he had died in the night—or was it on the scaffold he had perished, suffering the traitor's doom? And now he was being borne away to the fiery pit, and already felt the hot breath of the undying flames fanning his cheek.

With a wild shriek of terror he sprang up as if to fly, then he awoke thoroughly, and his faculties returned to him. He knew that he was not dead, that he was in his little bare room in the old inn, and that it must be this house itself which was now in flames.

There was no time to lose. The old-fashioned building was of wood, lath and plaster, and was burning like tinder. It might be already doubtful if the stairs would bear. Tom hurried on his few clothes with lightning speed, and cautiously opened the door.

A puff of hot and suffocating air blew in upon him, and without there seemed to be nothing but thick smoke charged with sparks. He heard shouts and cries from within and without the building. Plainly, the alarm was now universal;

but how to find the stairs in the midst of this darkness and suffocating heat he did not know. The winding passages of the old inn were intricate enough even by day, and what assurance had he that he would not be met and swallowed up by some volume of advancing flame, if he ventured to leave his present position?

What to do for the best he knew not. For the first time in his life Tom Heron was assailed by a deadly physical fear—he who had so often boasted that he knew not the meaning of the word. He felt that this moment he was standing upon the brink of eternity, and standing there alone; a sudden wave of terror overcame him, robbing him at once of his self-possession and his courage, causing his knees to knock one against the other, whilst a cold sweat broke out over his face. Nerveless, powerless, consumed with unspeakable horror, it seemed to him as though there was nothing for him but to wait where he was till a terrible death swallowed him up.

Shaking off by a tremendous effort this blind horror, he staggered a few paces along the narrow passage, only to be driven back by the ever-increasing heat and suffocating blasts of smoke. The air was so thick, so full of fiery sparks, that he could not even breathe in it; darting back into his room, he closed the door, and rushed to the casement to gasp for air.

Then perhaps he realised for the first time the deadly peril of his position. From the lower windows of the inn flames were already bursting, the whole place was in a blaze; most certainly he was a lost man—lost body and soul. The red flames he saw below him would in a few short minutes consume his body, and then the eternal flames of hell would prey for ever and ever upon his sin-stained soul.

But the hopelessness of his position helped to steady Tom's nerves. The love of life was strong and fierce within him: was there no way of escape? He looked



down into the narrow street below. If he jumped from the window, it would be certain death ; there were houses opposite, to be sure, but, narrow as the thoroughfare was, it was too wide to be spanned by a spring. The houses, it is true, were considerably lower than the inn. A trained gymnast might almost have performed the feat of leaping from Tom's window to the parapet of the building opposite ; but Tom, with all his strength of muscle, was not any great adept at feats of lightness and agility. He knew that such a jump was beyond his powers. He might be driven to trying it, but it would only be to be dashed to pieces on the stones below.

Oh the terrible loneliness of those moments ! Perhaps it was the loneliness that preyed most of all upon Tom's spirit. In the front of the building there were life and excitement enough ; but in this little side street not a soul seemed to be moving. The houses opposite had scarce any windows looking that way, and not a single face gazed forth in terror and sympathy ; not a living creature knew of his deadly peril, or stirred hand or foot to help him. He would perish alone, unseen, unpitied. Little Molly would never know why her brother came not home again. Samson, his mother, the lady of Ernscliff—none would ever know the history of his tragic death, or drop a tear for him. Oh, it was terrible, terrible, terrible ! It was worse than that fearful doom upon the scaffold, for there at least there were faces all around, and some eyes to look with kindly compassion upon the doomed.

'Friend !' cried a thin, penetrating voice from some place not far away, 'thou art in a great strait, but the Lord may have mercy on thee yet. If thou hast a strong arm and a steady head, methinks thou mayest be saved.'

Tom started violently and looked round him, and then he saw a small figure crawling along the parapet of the houses opposite. It seemed to pause for some time beside a chimney stack, and then reared itself upright. The glare

of the fire made the place as light as day, and Tom, with a start of exceeding surprise, recognised in the meagre proportions and insignificant features of the man opposite the little sandy-haired Methodist who had walked beside the condemned criminal that very afternoon.

A sudden wild thrill of hope passed through his frame. In his hour of sorest need had come to him the very man who had once appeared to his excited imagination to be treading with him the very brink of the valley of the shadow of death. Death was looking for him now; he could feel his fierce hot breath upon his cheek. He had already given himself up for lost; but there was one who offered him some chance of life, who had come to him in this hour of dire need, even as he had come to that other, just when all the world beside had forsaken him, and Death alone seemed to have him in his merciless clutches.

'Friend!' said the little man, calling shrilly above the roar and crackle of the flames, 'thou must act quickly and bravely, or thou art lost. See, I have here a rope. I will swing this weighted end across to thee, for thee to catch. Thou must then tie it about thy waist, and spring across to me here. I will strive to pull thee safely over; in any case thou canst not fall far, for the other end is safely knotted about yon chimney. Thou mayest be bruised and hurt perchance, but thy life will be whole. Do not pause nor tarry, for methinks the flames have well-nigh reached thee.'

All the time that the little man was speaking he was slowly and carefully swinging out the rope, which, weighted at the end, oscillated nearer and nearer to Tom each time, until at length he was able to lean down and catch the heavy end, and secure it firmly about him. He did not waver. He did not hesitate. His native courage had returned to him, and with it a confidence in the little man opposite which would have astonished him had he had time to analyse it. It seemed to him his duty to do as he was bidden without a second thought, and the next minute,

setting his teeth firmly, he made a desperate spring across the narrow chasm.

There was a strange feeling as of flying through the air—then came a crash, a grinding sensation, and a myriad of blood-red sparks danced before his eyes. He was vaguely aware of a dull pain in his head; then black darkness settled down upon him, and he knew no more of the details of his escape from the burning inn.

When next he opened his eyes it was to find himself lying half undressed upon a narrow pallet bed in a small and poor little room. A meagre fire burned in the grate, and the dull light of a tardy November dawn was shining in at the window. Everything in the place was spotlessly clean, but there was nothing there for ornament or show, and Tom fancied for the moment that he was in some unknown room in the inn; for he had changed his quarters before now, and did not always recollect in the morning the look of the place in which he had fallen asleep over-night. Had he been drinking hard? he wondered as he lay. His head felt unaccountably heavy, his eyelids seemed as if weighted with lead, his faculties were dull, and his memory was, for the time being, in abeyance. He could not even trouble himself to try and think, and closed his eyes again, until a slight noise at his side caused him to open them once more.

A little sandy-haired man was standing beside his bed, with a basin in his hand, which gave forth a savoury odour.

‘Thou hadst better drink this, my friend,’ said he; ‘my wife has prepared it with her own hands, so I know that it is good. When it is eaten thou canst finish thy sleep in peace.’

The sight of that face aroused in Tom vivid recollections of the scene of the previous night. He suddenly sat up in bed, but as quickly sank back with a groan, for the movement had brought on a qualm of sick giddiness never before experienced by him.

‘Gently, young man, gently,’ said the stranger, smiling;

'thou must remember that thou art still something shaken by thy leap and the blow upon that hard head of thine. Methinks thy skull will prove the harder of the twain ; but, verily, I feared once that thou hadst knocked out thy brains against the bricks of yon house.'

'Where am I ?' asked Tom feebly, as he took in the sense of these words, and allowed himself to be fed like a little child ; 'when did it all happen ? and who art thou ?'

'I will answer thy last question first, my friend. I am called here Brother Holdsworthy, and am what men call a Methodist ; and this is my poor abode, which I share with Brother Seaforth, who is one of our props and pillars, and powerful in pleading with the Lord. As for the fire, that happened but a few short hours ago, and the flames have but just burnt themselves out. It has been a terrible night for some—called away in the midst of their sins to meet an offended God.' Tom shuddered as he lay back on his hard pillow, thinking how narrowly he himself had escaped that fate.

'Did not all in the house escape ?' he asked.

'Not all. There were three young men high up in the building who perished miserably therein. No man could reach them, and though a'l might see them at the window, shouting and blaspheming God with their last breath, it was impossible to rescue them, and they went forth to meet the Judge with oaths and curses on their lips, and black evil thoughts in their hearts. Oh, what a terrible thing it is to leave our souls' salvation for a more convenient season ! How many are thus fearfully cut off in the midst of their sins, and how shall they, in the last dread hour, turn to One whom all their lives before they have slighted and contemned ?'

'Don't,' said Tom faintly, 'don't talk about it—now ! What were the names of the men who were burned in the inn ?'

Brother Holdsworthy had heard the names, and Tom

listened to them, a new thrill of horror passing through him. He had guessed as much before. They were the boon companions of his sojourn in York. With them he had spent the best part of his time, drinking, dicing, attending cock-fights and other savage spectacles. With them he had gone to see the executions, and had listened to their brutal and profane jests upon the ghastly scene. Wild and wicked and reckless as they were, he was held to be almost more so. His reputation transcended theirs. And now they had been suddenly called to their last account. They had died a terrible death, with their sins and their iniquities upon their heads. What was their fate? Whither had they gone? If there were another life beyond the grave, what would that life be for them and such as they?

Tom groaned aloud in the disquietude of his spirit, and the groan was partially understood.

'Young man,' asked the Methodist gravely, yet not unkindly, 'is it that thou hast perhaps had some dealings with those same godless youths in days gone by?'

'We were friends and comrades,' answered Tom, with another groan, partly caused by physical discomfort, partly by mental distress. 'Tell me, sir, what has become of them now?'

'Young man, there is none can rightly reply to that question save God alone; and we know to our hope and comfort that His mercies are great and everlasting. Yet He is just as well as merciful, and His words are easy to be understood. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned. Thou mayest best know if thy poor misguided comrades had ever repented of their sins and had them washed white in the blood of the Lamb.'

Tom turned away with a gasp of oppression and misery. It was terrible to hear words like these at such a time, when he could neither escape from them nor divert his thoughts from their dread significance. He felt for a moment as though he hated this little insignificant man who had such

power to move him ; and yet he did not wish to be alone—the very idea was intolerable, and he did not forget that it was to this very man that he owed his own life and safety.

‘Don’t go,’ he said, putting forth a hand as if to hold him ; ‘don’t go. Tell me more. Tell me of the fire. Tell me how you knew that I was there, and why you troubled about me. I was not worth the saving. I deserved to perish.’

The pale eyes of the Methodist regarded him searchingly.

‘Young man,’ he said, with a smile playing round the corners of his thin lips, ‘it may be that the Lord has saved thee for some great work. Thou art indeed as a brand plucked from the burning. How often have we seen that those whom He has willed to save as by a miracle are often vessels of grace, saved by Him for some especial work ! My brother, God Himself has snatched thee from the very jaws of death—from the talons of the devil, who was doubtless crouching to spring upon thee and carry thee off to hell. Oh, what else canst thou do than dedicate to the Lord’s service the life He has thus preserved ? How doubly dyed would thy ingratitude now be, if, after all He has done for thee, thou shouldest again turn thy face from Him and continue in the bonds of iniquity and the bitterness of death !’

Tom moved restlessly, and averted his gaze.

‘I am not fit to serve God. I have led a wicked life. I am worse than any of those three who perished in the flames last night.’

‘Young man, dost thou think that anything is too hard for the Lord ? Dost thou think that any heart is too strong for Him to break ? Is His arm at all shortened from the day when, with great signs and wonders, He wrought deliverance for Israel, and broke even the stubborn heart of Pharaoh ? Is Christ’s blood so impoverished that it cannot wash white the darkest stains ? Has His word in anywise failed, that we may not look with confidence to Him, however black be the sins upon our heads, however frail and feeble our

resolutions, our strength, our courage? Oh, brother, if it was on these we had to rely, how far short of the kingdom should we all come! But it is not ourselves—it is Christ in whom we trust. His is the fight, His the victory—His the triumph over sin. He has won salvation for us; all we have to do is to look to Him and take it. Only believe, and ye shall be saved; only believe, only believe.'

The little man's face was beaming, his thin hands were clasped together; the utter trust and confidence expressed by his upward glance was not lost upon the eager eyes of Tom.

As has been before mentioned, Tom Heron's imaginative powers were far more developed than is usual amongst men of his class, and as a natural sequence he possessed also the power of sympathy and quick insight which generally accompanies that gift. Many had been the sufferings his vivid powers of imagination had entailed upon him, but now they gave to him a strange and sudden comprehension of this new doctrine, which came upon him like a revelation.

Brother Holdsworthy, like all true and enthusiastic Methodists, held by the duty of speaking without fear and without preparation, in season and out of season, rebuking, exhorting, comforting all with whom he came in contact. The fact that he had rescued Tom from a fiery death gave him a sense of personal ownership in the young man, body and soul alike, which would in any case have stirred him up to active efforts for his conversion; whilst the questioning looks and the bitter words of his guest showed how sorely in need was this ignorant soul of the teaching he was longing to outpour.

So, without farther preamble, and carried away by his own zeal and fervour, the good man poured upon Tom's head all the burning words with which his heart was filled to overflowing; and Tom, weak in body, full of terror and remorse of soul, and yearning unutterably for light and truth and strength beyond anything he had yet known, as well as

for escape from the fire and worm that never die, listened with greedy attention, and with eager belief.

His imagination took fire ; the electric spark of sympathy passed from soul to soul. The earnestness, the perfect certainty of the teacher affected the mind of the pupil. With bated breath and wet eyes he heard the story of Calvary—a story scarce heard or heeded before—and saw the dying Saviour holding out His wounded hands and bidding him—him, the wicked, the reckless, the evil-living Tom Heron, come to Him to be saved. He saw the other side of the picture—the angry devils cursing that holy Saviour, and striving to hold him back from going to Him. Tom had known enough of that holding back, that luring on to wickedness, to believe every word he heard, and to see the fight raging over him by the powers of good and evil. He cried aloud in anguish of soul as he seemed to feel himself being dragged away from the foot of the Cross, whither he had flung himself in bitter humility rather than in faith ; and there were moments when the voice of his instructor seemed scarce to reach him, so terrible were the imprecations he heard breathed in his ear by the demons tempting him to his ruin.

That strange form of demoniacal possession (as it was accounted in those days to be ; though in this century it would probably be explained in another way) for a time took possession of him, and his cries of agony resounded through the little house.

And then, in the midst of the tumult and despair of his soul, another man came in to him, and falling on his knees beside the bed, broke into fervent prayer. Tom heard the new voice—a voice with a ring of power in it. He heard that voice bid all tempting, raging devils to be gone. He heard it adjure them by the name of the living God to trouble his soul no more ; and as he heard it seemed to him that a great quiet and calmness came over his spirit. The hateful whispers died into silence, the mocking laughter ceased, the

clutching hands were withdrawn from his throat. He could breathe, he could see and hear, he could even think. And then he saw kneeling beside him two pious and holy men, wrestling in prayer to the Crucified One for his poor lost soul ; and with a sudden burst of tears, so strange that they seemed to wash away all the hardness, the unbelief, the despair from his soul, he himself called aloud upon the living God, and owned in that Saviour his own Redeemer and Lord.

In the ranks of the Methodist body in York there was great rejoicing that day ; for Tom Heron, whose wild ways were not unknown even in that large place, was reported to have been converted, and to have found first conviction of sin, and afterwards unspeakable peace and assurance of salvation, in the house of the Methodist brethren.

CHAPTER XI.

A TROUBLESOME DAUGHTER.

IRENE'S face was full of distress and perplexity. She stood beside her mother with a troubled, downcast mien, whilst her maid laid out upon the bed the few and very plain dresses which had been exhumed from the great travelling trunk standing in the corner.

Madam was seated at ease in an arm-chair, watching the proceedings, and her brow was slightly contracted.

Why, child,' she said at last, 'where are your gala dresses? All these would better become a Quaker than a young lady of fashion. What did you think Bath would be like? Did you think it would be as quiet and solitary as Rookwood in the winter? Do you suppose you can go to the Pump Room in such garb as this? Sure you have been saving your money these past months to get yourself some fine dresses for Bath—so I have been saying to myself week after week, seeing you go about so plain a figure in your grey gowns; I thought there would be a brave show here, at least. Speak, child, where are your best clothes?'

'I have none but what you see here, ma'am,' answered Irene, with reddening cheeks and lowered eyelids.

Madam made one of her impatient gestures.

'Do not trifle with me, child. I know your father makes you a handsome allowance for your clothes. I always thought you over-young to choose for yourself, but he humoured you and let you have your own way. If you have





not the dresses, you have the money to buy them. Did you save it up to spend here? Let us see how much you have got.'

The girl's cheeks were increasingly red; her voice was very low.

'I have not any money, ma'am. It is all gone.'

Madam turned round and looked at her daughter.

'Gone? How? How has it gone? What did you buy with it? Let me see.'

'I did not spend it exactly,' faltered Irene, who stood in no small awe of her mother; 'I did not get anything for myself. I—gave it away.'

'To whom?'

Madam's tone was suddenly so sharp that Irene quailed before it. As a matter of fact, a sudden qualm had come into the mother's heart that her first-born and best-loved child, Fulk, had been getting into trouble, and that his sister had been secretly helping him. This fear was so real and so keen that for the moment it over-mastered any other; and when Irene faltered out that the money had been given to the poor, the lady's brow relaxed, and for the moment she forgot to be either surprised or alarmed. Of course there were plenty of poor folks in Sax, and it would be like the reserved Irene to give away her money amongst them without speaking of it to others.

'You are a foolish child,' she said; 'but I trow that all young things are foolish, especially when they first have the handling of solid gold and silver. Didst think thy father gave thee money to throw away broadcast amongst his poor tenants? If their need were pressing they could have come to him. But now we must to business. We will not chide you this time for folly, but your wardrobe must be remodelled. We cannot let our only daughter go about looking like a convent nun. Fortunately Bath can supply all that is lacking, and we will set about it at once.'

As madam had spoken these words concerning Irene's

charities to her father's tenants a deeper flush had overspread the girl's face, and for a moment her lips parted as if in speech ; but no words had come, and madam had passed on to the other subject, so that the moment for explanation—if any were owing—was quickly gone.

'But, ma'am,' pleaded Irene, 'please do not buy me fine clothes. I like my plain gowns better ; and it is not fair that I should have the money and the dress both——'

'Tush, child ! Your father can afford to gratify a childish whim without forcing you to go about Bath such a little unmodish maiden as you now appear. Why, Irene, you little know what is in store for you—balls, promenades, the gaieties of the Pump Room and the Assembly Room, and all the winter festivities of Bath. And I suspect we shall soon see somebody else here—somebody you will be pleased, I doubt not, to welcome. So put on your walking pelisse and the hat with the long plume, and I will have a chair called, and we will sally forth at once ; for we must lose no time in getting you fitted to take your place amongst the fashionable ladies of Bath.'

Madam rose and swept away, with an injunction to the maid to have her young mistress quickly attired for a walk in the streets. When the door had closed behind her Irene turned with a piteous look to the grave-faced, rather hard-featured young woman who attended on her.

'Oh, Nancy !' she cried, 'what shall I do ?'

Nancy Dawson, for it was none other than the farmer's daughter, shook her head gloomily.

'Nay, ma'am, I know not. It is in a sore strait you are placed. But you are not the only one who has been called upon before now to choose betwixt evil and good, God and Mammon—the favour of the world and the blessing which is reserved for those who are faithful in that which is least, as well as in that which is greatest.'

Irene clasped her hands together, and the tears stood in her eyes.

‘Oh, Nancy, if I did but know what to do! I am so young to disobey my parents! Is it really wrong to wear fine clothes, and to go to the places of amusement to which one’s parents take one?’

‘That holy man, Mr. Wesley, says that all such amusements as dancing and theatre-going are deadly sins; and many are the judgments of God upon such as follow after them,’ answered the inexorable Nancy, who had inherited much of her mother’s inflexible disposition, although she had grafted upon it teaching of a very different school from the one in which Janet had been reared. ‘As for the wearing of fine apparel and golden ornaments, that also he condemns in no measured terms. Our wealth is not ours to squander in personal adornment or in riotous living. It is given us in trust for the Lord, to be given amongst the poor around. You, lady, have been able to bestow of your abundance to the needy of Mr. Wesley’s flock. Having put your hand to the plough, are you going now to look back?’

Irene twisted her hands together in silent perplexity.

‘Nancy,’ she said, ‘I have been very unhappy about that money I gave you to give to the Methodists. My mother would be sorely angry if she knew. Can it be right to deceive her and my kind father? When she spoke just now about the tenants, I felt as if I could sink into the very ground for shame. I did not dare to tell her how it had gone; was it wrong that I did not speak openly?’

‘I trow not, ma’am,’ answered Nancy reflectively. ‘Madam would but have fallen into a great choler, and have uttered words that would have been a dire offence to the Lord. It were better she were not provoked to speak unadvisedly with her lips. It may be that the day will come when she will be brought to see the error of her ways. It is your duty, dear mistress, to save your own soul, and walk after the counsel of the godly men whose doctrine you have had faith to receive. We know that strait is the way that leads to everlasting life, and that few there be who find it. Let us

see that we be not tempted to leave it for the broad road. Our first duty is our own salvation.'

Irene breathed forth a heavy sigh. These discussions with her maid, whilst often reassuring her and strengthening her in the course she meant to pursue, often left a heavy-heartedness behind them for which the girl could not altogether account. She was sure she was right in following the teachings now arousing such discussion and attention. She was sure they contained the truth—she believed the whole truth—of Christianity; and she trusted that by living up to them to the utmost of her ability she would be following in the footsteps of Christ, and fighting the Christian's battle. But she knew that either she would have to lead a double life, bow down in the house of Rimmon, as Nancy had expressed it, whilst in private following out her own code of religion and ethics, or else involve herself in a war *à outrance* with her autocratic mother; and from such a war as that would be, Irene felt a natural and intense shrinking. A century and a half ago it was no light matter for a girl to rebel against parental authority. The modern independence of womanhood was a thing unknown. As Irene walked the gay streets of Bath beside her mother's chair, and entered with her the most fashionable shops of that crowded resort of aristocratic invalids and idle dandies of both sexes, her heart was as heavy as lead, and she felt that it would be hopeless to fight out the battle here. She must content herself with as much silent and passive resistance as she dared to assume, and hope by that to pave the way for a bolder course of action later on.

Madam simply delighted in shopping, and her husband never complained of the length of the bill, provided his wife was the most admired and the most elegantly attired woman in the place. He was proud of her and fond of her beyond the wont of the husbands of fashionable wives, and as she herself had an ample fortune, he considered it but fair that she should gratify her expensive tastes as she chose.

This was Irene's first visit to Bath, and was tantamount to the modern 'coming out' of a young lady in her teens. A London season and a presentation at Court might or might not follow, but a winter at Bath was considered as an ample equivalent.

Her life had hitherto been so quiet and retired that she had small notion of what things were like at a gay and fashionable resort; and she stood by in mute amazement whilst her mother issued orders to obsequious tradespeople as to the equipment of her daughter, regarding the costly silks and laces with silent horror, and listening to orders for gold and silver lacings, fur linings and trimmings, and quaint conceits in colour and form, almost as if she were listening to the order for her execution.

Madam was too much engrossed in her own thoughts to heed her daughter's silence at the first; but presently, having completed the bulk of her purchases, and having received promises that her orders should be completed with all possible dispatch, she turned to Irene, expecting to see the light of pleasure and gratitude in her eyes. The girl's silence had not struck her as anything strange. It was usual for young people to be silent before their elders, and madam was not wont to consult any one, when so certain of the faultlessness of her own taste; but she did look for pleasure and gratification upon the face of a girl thus equipped with everything heart could wish, and when she saw the pale cheek and downcast bearing of her daughter she asked quite sharply,—

'Well, child, what more do you want than you have got? Do not sulk, but speak out. I have done my best to please you, why such sour looks? What is amiss?'

'Oh, ma'am, indeed it is not that, you have got me tenfold too much. How can I ever wear so many rich robes? In sooth, I would have you tell them I need not a tithe of what you have ordered.'

Madam's brow cleared a little, but she spoke with considerable incisiveness also.

'Tush, child ! What do you know of what will be required ? You will find it none too much for your needs. They say that the season will be unwontedly gay, and to-day we heard that your Aunt Bridget had been ordered to take the waters for an attack of rheumatism, and that she is coming at once, and Athol with her. We shall be a gay party indeed, for we shall be all in the same house. Athol will be a capital companion for you. You look as if you wanted rousing and cheering up. Of course Fulk will escort the ladies here, and remain with us for a time ; but you will not be left out in the cold, child. Athol will have plenty of time for going about with you.'

Irene was glad to hear of her cousin's arrival. She was fond of Athol, although the latter did laugh at her and tease her ; and since the formal betrothal which had taken place between her cousin and Fulk the tie had been drawn more closely. Then, although Aunt Bridget had a sharp tongue, she also possessed a kind heart, and madam would have less undivided time to give to her daughter if she had other relatives in the house beside.

The days seemed long to Irene, those early days at Bath. She was taken daily to the Pump Room by her mother, and sat or walked beside her, dressed in garments which it went against her conscience to put on, listening to the sugared speeches of gay young gallants and the gossip of powdered matrons, who flirted their fans, laughed and grimaced, and discussed every bit of scandal or tittle-tattle with the keenest interest and enjoyment.

Irene looked on and listened with all the unmerciful severity of judgment characteristic of the very young. Her eyes were full of grave disapproval, her answers were monosyllabic, and her manner was cold and repellent. Some beauty she had, and her mother's faultless taste had enchanced it by all that art could accomplish in the matter of dress ; but for all that Irene failed to make any impression upon the fashionable gallants who fluttered at first around her. Her mother would

have had no objection to a coldness that had in it the distinguished haughtiness of high birth. A reputation for aloofness was in some cases the very best which could be obtained, and was the making of a woman at the commencement of her career; but it was only too soon apparent that Irene was simply voted a bore—stupid, prudish, ill-informed, and uninteresting; and as her mother well knew that she was in reality a cultivated and intelligent girl, her annoyance was very great, and she spoke so sharply to her daughter from time to time as to reduce her to tears, though without producing any improvement in her deportment.

Irene, therefore, looked forward to Athol's arrival with a sense of great relief; but the day on which the travellers were expected to arrive found her in dire disgrace. There was to be a grand ball at the Assembly Rooms that night. Athol had set her heart upon being there. An exquisite dress had come for Irene, and the girl had had the madness and folly to declare that she hated dancing; that she could not bear hot rooms and late hours; that her head ached at the bare thought of such an entertainment, and that she had quite made up her mind not to go.

A few weeks before she had shirked the ball at York under similar pretexts, and by an appeal to her indulgent father had contrived to obtain his permission to stay away; but the repetition of these feeble arguments now was childish and absurd, and roused not only the anger, but the suspicions of madam. She began to see that there was something 'odd' about Irene. She went no farther than that even in her thoughts, and she was resolved to conquer her. She sent the girl at once to her room in disgrace, and bid her not to speak a single word on the subject. She could rest her fill all the day, but go to the ball at night she should; and when Athol arrived it was to find that Irene was a prisoner in her own room, whither, after hearing her aunt's story of her obstinacy and folly, her cousin went to find her.

Irene had spent the long hours of the day in conversation

with her maid and in the study of portions of Scripture, which the latter had pointed out to her as bearing upon the point in question. Irene had reached the unalterable conclusion that to put on a ball dress and go to a ball was to put the salvation of her soul in peril; and her frame of mind was not one to be envied.

And then in came Athol, as blooming and sparkling as though such a thing as the fatigue of travel were unknown to her, full of laughing and caressing banter, calling her cousin a little goose and other like names; striving to laugh her out of her puritanical notions, and asking if she thought that *she* was desperately wicked for enjoying the good things of life that fell to her share.

Irene shook her head. She did not wish to condemn others, she said; but for herself she knew it was wrong to go to such places, and she did not know how to sin against her conscience. Athol's face took a look of momentary perplexity, but argument was less her forte than caressing banter; moreover, her attention was caught by the sheeny glitter of the dress upon the bed, and she turned to examine it with a little cry of pleasure.

'Cream satin sacque, over-bodice and under-petticoat of this exquisite lace! Irene, it is perfect; just like your mother's taste. And are these pearls to wear with it? Lucky girl; I shall not be half as striking. No, I shan't pity you any more; you are a little goose. I must run to my own rooms too, to see after my own gown. And here is Aunt Bridget, come, no doubt, to help to scold you into a better frame of mind.'

Athol ran off, and Miss Fortescue came in to kiss and speak kind words to her niece, scanning her pale, troubled face all the while with her shrewd though kindly eyes. After a while she spoke with her characteristic abruptness.

'And now, child, tell me what all this coil is about. In my days we young folks obeyed our parents without a word, as the Bible bids us; but those old fashions seem to have

gone by nowadays. This is the second time you have almost flatly refused to go with your mother to a ball. What does it all mean? Tell me your objection. You need not be afraid of me. I never think worse of man or woman for speaking out boldly. I hate half measures.'

'Oh, Aunt Bridget, I believe it is wicked to dance!' cried Irene; 'and I would rather die than do what is wicked.'

'Stuff, child! Who wants you to die? Keep your heroics for a more important occasion. Why do you think dancing wicked?'

Irene twisted her hands together, and was silent. Mrs. Bridget studied her face intently for a while, and then spoke herself,—

'Well, child, I have the least bit of sympathy for your feeling, though I should be sorry to put so strong a word as "wicked" upon any amusement which can most certainly be harmlessly and innocently enjoyed by merry young folks together. But, all the same, it too often becomes a frivolous and unprofitable, sometimes an immodest exhibition, and leads to other evils as well. Folks may easily have enough and too much of it. I'd rather a child of mine liked it too little than too well. But see here, my dear, suppose I stand your friend with your mother, and ask her to excuse you from dancing, will you be a reasonable and sensible child, and go quietly with the rest of us to the Assembly Rooms to look on? You will see plenty to amuse you, and your mother will have her daughter beside her, as it is fitting she should; but you are looking pale and heavy-eyed, and it will surprise nobody that you do not feel disposed to dance.'

This appeared to Miss Fortescue such a reasonable suggestion, that she felt certain it would be eagerly accepted, and her surprise was considerable when she saw that Irene hesitated still.

'Speak, child!' she said impatiently. 'What more have you to object to?'

The girl coloured at the tone, and moved across the room

to where the ball dress hung. She picked up a shining fold in her hand, and said, 'I shall have to wear this if I go, and these pearls too.'

'And very pretty and suitable they are to your position in life. What more do you want, my dear?'

'No more indeed, but less. I do not like going about so fine. It seems wrong, when women are bidden to think of the adornment of the spirit, not of the body, and so many thousands of poor are starving with hunger.'

'Yes, and how many more would be starving, I wonder, if we rich folks did not buy the products of their looms and their lace pillows? Child, child! talk about what you understand, and do not let conscientiousness turn to wilful obstinacy. Oh, I know what you would say! I have heard these new-fangled doctrines again and again, and my patience is fast going. Bless the child! does she think the heart is less pure because it beats under silk instead of fustian; and that a suitable clothing of the body keeps the atoning blood from the soul? The good folks who preach these doctrines are very fond of telling us of Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and they would scarce deny that what is true of the Son is also true of the Father. And have we not pages and pages of our Bibles devoted to instructions as to how garments are to be made "for glory and for beauty," set with precious gems, and adorned with gold and embroidery, and every kind of cunning work? If it be against the law of God for men and women thus to attire themselves at fitting seasons, sure it were strange that His own priests should go before Him thus bedizened. Sure in their garb we should not find the accursed thing which it is pollution to wear. And who but God ordered the women to bring their gold ornaments to be used for the service of His sanctuary? Think you that, had there been pollution or sin in the wearing of them, God would have had them dedicated to His service? Oh, foolish child, are not all things given to us by a wise and merciful and gracious God richly to enjoy?

And because each one of His gifts may be abused by those who read not His will aright, is it for us, in the self-righteousness of our hearts, to deny to ourselves or others the right and lawful use of each? Go to, little one; put on thy silken gown, and thank God for it, and for kind parents to keep thee softly clad and nurtured, and be not hasty to rise up and condemn them or others. Use all the gifts of God to His glory, and make them not into stumbling-blocks and idols.'

Irene went that night to the Assembly Rooms in her new dress, and did not dance. Her mother was fairly well satisfied with the compromise, and hoped that all trouble was at an end; but Athol and Mrs. Bridget, who had gained somewhat more insight into the girl's nature than was possessed by her mother, were by no means convinced that this triumph was final or complete.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FORTESCUES AT BATH.

‘**W**HERE is Irene?’ asked madam sharply, regarding the vacant place at the breakfast-table with some displeasure.

‘I think she is abroad with her maid,’ answered Athol. ‘She is much addicted to an early morning walk. She goes forth two or three times in a week.’

‘A fine country habit,’ said the squire placably; ‘I am glad the maid has such sense. She is looking sadly pined in this gay place. Doubtless she is beginning to long, as I am, for the freedom of the country again.’

‘I cannot think what has come over Irene or late,’ remarked Fulk; ‘she has lost all her colour and good looks and quietly saucy ways, and is as demure, and often as dismal, as the veriest Puritan. Methinks Hugh will scarcely know her when he comes. But, perchance, he will do her good. In old days those two seemed to have much goodwill and understanding of one another. Comes he quickly, say you, sir?’

The squire referred to an open letter by his plate, and said, ‘He hopes to follow this in about two days’ time. He has been working something over-hard at his books—that was always the way with Hugh—and has been recommended to leave them for a while. He would rather have waited till we were at home again, but he is bidden not to tarry, so he comes here first, and will, perhaps, return with us shortly to Rookwood.’

The sunshine of a bright February day was illuminating the room in which the Fortescue family had assembled for the breakfast, which was at an hour that for the times was fashionably late. Mrs. Bridget was no longer of the party, having completed her cure some fortnight since, and returned to her brother's house at Hownston; but Athol had been left behind, to remain as long as the other family of Fortescues did. She was enjoying herself vastly, and greatly enhancing the pleasure of madam, who had now a vivacious and talkative companion at her side, and the handsomest girl in Bath to chaperon to the many scenes of amusement there.

The courtship of Fulk and Athol, too, was a source of great pleasure and interest to her. She was very proud of her elder son, and had always set her heart upon his marriage with his handsome and well-dowered cousin. There was no denying the fact that her own daughter had been a failure; and madam so cordially hated failures, that after the first fortnight of Athol's visit she had almost ceased even to wish to take Irene into society. Her daughter-in-law elect was as great a success as Irene was the reverse; and as late hours, hot rooms, and the round of social dissipation appeared to tell unfavourably upon the younger girl's health, she had been gradually allowed to shirk all but the morning promenade in the Pump Room, and was left for the most part to her own quiet retired ways, save when her father took her out for a ride with him, or she joined Athol and Fulk in some like exercise. Mrs. Bridget had recommended that the child should be let alone, and not forced into society against her will; nevertheless that shrewd woman had given to the girl many pieces of rather incisive counsel, which had been received in the silence with which Irene almost always now did receive advice, of whatever kind it might be.

So little heed was now paid to the quiet pensive girl, that Athol alone experienced any misgivings on her account; and she was too busy and too full of pleasurable occupation to have much time or thought to spare for her little cousin.

She had, however, observed of late that Irene seemed in unwontedly low spirits. Often in the mornings her eyes were red and heavy, as though she had been watching or weeping half the night; her movements were listless and lifeless, and not unfrequently, if playfully rallied by her vivacious cousin, she would burst into uncontrollable weeping, though she never spoke of the source of her unhappiness, and grew more silent and more drooping day by day. If such a thing had been possible to believe, Athol would have thought that Irene was pining after her professed lover, young Lord Lovel, who had been at Bath for a short time, but had quickly departed, possibly disgusted by the tame and cold reception accorded him by the lady he had honoured by his preference. But knowing as she did that her cousin was worse than indifferent towards the young man, she could not connect her grief with his absence, and had almost ceased to trouble herself about it, regarding it as a nameless malady which time would cure, and only striving with good-natured tact to engross her aunt's attention, and keep her from persecuting her unsatisfactory daughter.

What therefore was Athol's surprise, when, as they were in the middle of breakfast this bright morning, Irene came in with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, her whole face irradiated and almost transfigured, a look of rapture and exaltation in her eyes which was absolutely startling.

Irene was much addicted to early walks with her maid—so much Athol knew before, though at what hour she rose and where she went she had no notion; but generally she returned before the breakfast hour, looking worn and weary and faint. What could have happened to change her so to-day? She looked in silent amaze at the radiant creature before her, and felt absolutely confounded at her appearance.

Madam, who was reading Hugh's letter, looked up with a sharp rebuke at such irregular habits; but the squire, who was glad to see rosy cheeks and bright eyes again, laughingly called the girl to him, declaring that it was plain that early

hours were the right thing for her, and that if she brought such roses home, she should not be chidden for being late. Doubtless she had been out upon the downs, and had come back with a hunter's appetite. He piled her plate with good things as he spoke, and bid her sit beside him to eat them, whilst he told her of the news concerning Hugh.

But it seemed to Athol, who was closely watching Irene, that he was speaking to deaf ears. She smiled and said Yes or No from time to time, but her thoughts were plainly far away. The light in her eyes did not fade or change, but it was a light which responded to no impression from without. Athol grew more and more curious as the minutes flew by. Judging from her own experiences of life, she would have said that Irene had come straight from some happy meeting with a secret lover; but the idea of such a thing as connected with her cousin seemed absurd, and yet it began to be plain to her that Irene was indulging in some secret mystery of her own. This strange and radiant gladness was as remarkable and inexplicable in its way as the profound melancholy it had displaced.

When they rose from table she slipped her hand within her cousin's arm, and the two girls passed upstairs to the little boudoir they were supposed to share together, though Irene nearly always preferred to use her own bed-room. A cheery fire was blazing on the hearth, and Athol pushed her companion into a comfortable chair, and stood over her, scanning her face with great attention.

'Irene,' she said at last, 'what has come to you? You are a different being this morning. I cannot understand you.'

The girl clasped her hands together, and the light seemed to deepen in her eyes.

'Different! Oh, Athol, it only you could know what that difference is—the difference between the blackest night and the most glorious day; betwixt heaven and hell itself, methinks! Oh, would that you did also know it, dear

cousin ; the release from sin, the perfect joy of knowing the Saviour for *your* Saviour, the knowledge of His pardoning love. Oh, the weary burden of sin that has been weighing me down ! And now to know that all is pardoned, all taken away ; that He is mine and I am His ! Oh, Athol, Athol, I have heard of it before. I have even seen it in others. But the blessedness of knowing it in one's own heart ! Oh, dear, dear cousin, will you not come to Him too ? He is waiting to call you His. Come to Him now, and be happy, as I am happy, in Him and Him alone.'

Athol stood silent and confounded. To hear the silent, reserved, depressed Irene break forth thus into a flood of impassioned speech was so astonishing that the elder girl knew not what to think or to say. The phrases which fell so eagerly from Irene's lips sounded strangely in the ears of the rector's daughter. She had not had sufficient interest in the new revival within and without the Church to recognise its language. For a moment it seemed to her as though Irene's senses had suddenly deserted her.

'My dear child,' she said, 'be calm. I do not know what you are talking about. Of course we are all children of God ; we were made so in our baptism, surely you believe that. I am not much of a theologian, but I do know that we have been baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ, and that we are His by adoption and grace. You need not speak as though I were beyond the pale. I have never professed to be better than other people, but at least I *am* a Christian ; you will scarcely deny me that privilege, I trow ?'

But Irene did not smile ; her face was full of pleading and passion.

'A Christian—and given over to worldly enjoyments and carnal pleasures ? A Christian, and not a humble follower of Christ ? A Christian, and yet not seeking Him first in every action of your life ? A Christian, yet not flinging yourself in deepest abasement and misery at the foot of His

Cross, pleading and agonising for pardon, till He is graciously pleased to set you free? Oh, Athol, I speak of what I know and have experienced. I would not speak at all if I did not know the more excellent way. I have agonised and suffered. I have prayed day and night for pardon and peace. I have told myself that it would never, never come. And, behold, to-day, this very morning, as we were singing together one of those sweet hymns of Mr. Charles Wesley's that tell of the boundless mercy and love of God, behold the black cloud suddenly lifted, the sunlight poured into my soul. I knew that I, too, was forgiven; that I was loved, pardoned, justified, sanctified. Oh, Athol, Athol, I would that all the world could share that glorious knowledge, that glorious joy!

Athol simply stood aghast at a revelation which had burst upon her with the force of the utterly unexpected.

'Irene,' she said slowly, 'do you know what you have said? You have spoken words which have betrayed a secret to me. I knew that you often went out early in the mornings, but I did not profess to know where. Now I can have no further doubt. You go to those five o'clock Methodist conventicles, against which we hear so much spoken. What would your mother say if she were to know?'

'I know not, I care not!' answered Irene vehemently. 'Did not Christ Himself say to us that he who hated not father, mother, brother, sister, ay, and his own life too, was not worthy to be called His disciple? It is better to serve God than to please man. I have lived in darkness and blindness of spirit all my past life. Am I to refuse free salvation when it is held out to me from a coward fear of what a worldly mother would say?'

Athol drew her brows together sharply.

'Dear cousin,' she said, quietly enough, 'if this new doctrine of which you tell me, teaches you first to deceive and disobey, and then to speak slightly of your own mother, I must be

pardoned for declining to have anything to do with it. I do not much believe in new religions. The old one is good enough for me. "Honour thy father and thy mother," it tells us; and again, "Children, obey your parents." I do not care to argue; I doubt not you are well stuffed with texts and sophisms, and I doubt not for a moment that all you have done you have done with a clear conscience; but, for my part, I like it not. I would have fought your battle in sister-fashion, had you boldly asked leave of your mother to go to these meetings; but to go by stealth, under cover of a morning walk, I like not. It savours too much of cowardice and subterfuge.'

Irene's face had flushed hotly. Her reply was vehemently spoken.

'You know it would have been useless to ask. She would not only have refused, she would have made of me a prisoner, and my poor famished soul would have starved and pined away for lack of heavenly food. I like not secrets either; but what could I do? When the choice lies betwixt pleasing man and obeying God, there can but be one end to it. You remember the words of Peter and John when in like case? "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than God, judge ye."'

Athol turned away with an impatient sigh.

'Oh, I knew you would have texts enough and to spare. Who was it said that the devil could quote Scripture for his own ends if he had a mind thereunto? Not that I am comparing you to his satanic majesty, dear coz. Still, I cannot see things as you do altogether, and I am not certain that I wish to; but, on the other hand, I will not set myself up as a judge.'

And there for the present the matter ended. Irene glided off to shut herself up upon her knees with her new-found and ecstatic happiness, whilst Athol dressed for her daily ride, with a perplexed feeling at heart, and was more and more convinced that the less people meddled with the vexed

question of religious controversy the better and happier it was for them.

'It is that maid who is at the bottom of it all, I will be bound,' she said; 'this change began to come over Irene almost from the day Nancy began to wait upon her. Those Dawsons have always been a stiff-necked family in religious matters. I should not have thought that one of Janet's daughters would have turned Methodist; but I remember we did fear that the farmer himself was bitten. Well, well, it is no concern of mine; but I hope when Hugh comes that Irene will open her heart to him. It seems neither fitting nor proper that she should be more than half a Methodist herself, whilst her mother knows nothing of it, and hates the very sound of the word. In old days Hugh had influence with her. Strange, how those natures that seem so soft and yielding are really so stubborn and unimpressionable! They seem to yield like india-rubber, but they spring back just in the same way to their former shape. Heigh-ho! well, it is no business of mine. I am thankful I never had any wish to be more religious than the rest of the world, or than my dear old father thought needful.'

Irene's exalted frame of mind continued through the next day, and upon the third Hugh made his appearance at Bath. He was not much like his handsome brother, being far less magnificent in his outer man, and lacking the gay dashing air of distinction which always made Fulk a power wherever he went. He had the well-cut Fortescue features, with some of madam's decision in the lines of the mouth; but the eyes were dark blue-grey, and very deep-set beneath the intellectual brow, and were often dreamy and abstracted in expression, although upon occasion they could glow and flash and reflect very varying emotions. Hugh was tall, but very slight, and he had the book-worm tendency to stoop; this tendency was quickly noticed by his father, who prescribed much horse exercise to eradicate it. He had plainly overtasked his health through the severe application to study

in which he had indulged for the past two years, and though not ill, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, he was in need of rest and change.

It was not wonderful, then, considering his state of health, and the nature of his tastes and habits, that he and Irene should be thrown a good deal together. The social dissipation of Bath had small attraction for him, and late hours and hot rooms were avoided by medical advice. Therefore by the end of a week it came about that he and his sister had resumed the old habit of childhood, and consorted a great deal together; whilst Irene had lost, in a great measure, the shyness and constraint which had grown up during the two years' absence of Hugh at Oxford. She recognised in him a seriousness she had not found in any other member of her family, and she listened with great attention when at last he spoke to her of his own plans for the future.

'Of course I shall enter the Church,' he said one day; 'it has always been my father's wish that I should do so. There are several family livings to which he wishes me to succeed after my uncle, as other Fortescues have done in past times. But, for my own part, I think I should prefer only to hold one, and to do the work of that one as, I take it, it should be done. It is time that we of the Established Church awoke to our call and our responsibilities, and showed the world that we too can work, can feed the flock, can live lives of self-sacrifice and self-denial. The Wesleys, Mr. Whitefield, Mr. Ingham, and many more have set a noble example, but they have in some ways gone too far; neither do they wish for care over any particular place or parish. The day may come—I think it is fast coming—when their followers will induce them to take steps which shall make of the Methodists a sect to themselves, which thing was no part of the original scheme of its founders, and, indeed, is resolutely and boldly opposed by them now. But be that as it may, they have been the pioneers in a noble work, and we must not be slack to follow their example in its wider spirit, trusting to avoid

by God's grace some of the pitfalls into which we some of us think they are like to fall.'

'Brother, brother, speak not against them!' cried Irene, with sudden heat. 'Oh, I would that you would join that noble band—walking in holiness and integrity, and in the fear of the Lord! Yes, I will tell you, though not a soul save Athol knows it now, and she surprised my secret from me. The Methodists have saved my soul. I was bowed down to the very dust beneath the burden of my sins, and they showed me the way to Christ; with them I received light, peace, hope, assurance of salvation. Oh, my brother, have you received that great gift? Do you know your sins forgiven? Can you look up to your Saviour and know Him for your own? Oh, if not, go to them and ask them to point the way. They are good and holy and Christ-like men, and every day sinners are coming under conviction, and receiving an answer of peace to their souls.'

Hugh was little less surprised at this outburst than Athol had been, but he understood it far better. He understood too the nature of his sister's mind—at once so reserved, but, where reserve had broken down, so impulsive and eager of speech. He let none of his surprise appear in his face or manner, but as they rode quietly along side by side over the solitary downs, he drew from her by questions the whole history of the past year of her life. He was then able to enter into her feelings, her struggles, temptations, and difficulties as he had never been able before, and as no one else in the world could have done, because at heart Hugh and Irene were very much alike, and therefore very much in sympathy in such matters.

Nevertheless his face was rather grave as the whole story was told, and he said very gently, though very firmly,—

'Athol was quite right in what she said, Irene, though it may have sounded harsh; you ought not to act in defiance of our mother's wishes. You ought not to do secretly what you would not dare to do openly. It is acting a lie, however

we may gloss it over. And it can never, never be right to do evil that good may come.'

Irene's eyes dilated as she burst into vehement speech—a speech embodying all her difficulties, her explanations, her palliations of her conduct, her utter hopelessness of ever winning the smallest concession from her mother. Hugh listened with great sympathy, but shook his head at the end.

'I fully see the difficulties in the way; but, for all that, the thing ought to be done. I do not myself believe very much in growing in grace or getting nearer to God, if we begin by ever such a small deflection from His own appointed way.'

The girl made a gesture of despair.

'Then I must lose my own soul to please my mother's whim.'

'Irene, Irene!' answered Hugh, 'think what you are saying, and beware. Are you not a baptised Christian? Have you not the church to go to Sunday by Sunday? Do you not kneel before God's table and receive the Holy Communion from His appointed minister? What more can even these earnest and devout men teach you than is contained in the word of Divine guidance to be found in your own Bible, as read and expounded in the Church's services? I know what these men teach—it is not new doctrine; it is held by our own Church, from which they have not seceded.'

'Then why do they not teach it?' cried Irene passionately. 'Why, if they have the words of life, do they not dispense them to the hungry flock? Why are we left to pine and starve?'

'Are you left to starve? You individually, I mean, Irene? I dare not deny that the Church of this land has woefully fallen from her high estate, that her pastors have, in many places neglected and betrayed their trust; but still there are faithful shepherds to be found, and methinks by what I hear you at Sax have little to complain of. I know something

by repute of Mr. Latham. Does not he teach the word of life faithfully ?'

Irene sighed impatiently and hung her head.

'In sooth, I scarce know. He has been with us but a short while, and I have grown weary of trying to make sense of the dull discourses we hear in church at home.'

'Ay, and so in weariness and disgust you condemn them all, and rush to pastures new for the food which, perchance, you might get at home if you would but strive for it there. Nay, turn not away, dear sister ; I have said my say, and will trouble you no more. I will not betray your confidence. All you have told me I hold sacred. I ask you only to watch and pray and judge for yourself, whether this present course of yours is not like to lead you at last into a position which may, perchance, throw discredit upon your Christian calling and profession.'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROSELYTE.

ONE bright cold day early in March, when the farmers were bestirring themselves upon the land, and the birds beginning to find their voices again after the long winter of the north, the village of Sax was more or less electrified by the news that Tom Heron had returned at last, and was to be seen sharpening harrows and shoeing horses within the precincts of his uncle's forge.

For nearly five months nothing whatever had been heard of Tom. If he had written to his uncle (which was most improbable), Samson had not mentioned the matter to anybody. Not a soul in the place had the least idea where he had been, or what had kept him away for such an unwontedly long period ; but the news of his return spread like wildfire, and before the first morning had passed Luke Crowder, together with some half-dozen of his old boon companions, had gathered together to go to the forge and give him a welcome back.

Tom was shoeing a troublesome young horse when his quondam friends arrived upon the scene, and it had never been his way at any time to neglect the task in hand for idle gossip with his own comrades. It therefore surprised no one that he responded to the noisy greetings bestowed upon him with nothing more than a brief nod, and concentrated his attention upon the animal under his hands, fitting, paring, and nailing with all his habitual skill and force of

muscle, speaking gently and firmly to the fidgety creature, and proving that his hands had not lost their cunning during his long absence.

His friends lounged round the open shed, and watched him with approval. They were all delighted to have Tom back amongst them again. Luke was giving out that they should all have an invitation to the Red Dragon that very evening, and that they would 'make' a night of it' together, in honour of Tom's return. The interest in this prospect (for the carouse was to be at the expense of Luke's father) attracted the attention of the group, and for the moment drew it away from Tom, who continued busily driving in his nails, whilst his companions chatted and swore in their customary way, seldom finishing a sentence without letting fall some profane expression or blasphemous word. There was considerable curiosity in the minds of the youths to know how Tom would enjoy the prospect of seeing his mother installed as mistress of the Red Dragon. Luke's mother had died during the previous year, and rather to the surprise of the whole community Nat had commenced paying serious attentions to Jenny Heron very soon after her remarkable seizure on the occasion of Whitefield's sermon near Sax. It appeared as though the prospect of a comfortable home and assured income had acted beneficially upon the woman. She had soon forgotten her distress of mind and perturbation of spirit, and after a small space of hesitation, when she seemed undecided as to whether she would turn Methodist in good earnest or marry Nat the publican, she had finally decided upon the latter course, and the wedding had been duly celebrated upon New Year's Day. Jenny had always been a good-looking woman, though of late years her wild irregular life had told unfavourably upon her appearance. A few weeks of life at the Red Dragon had improved her wonderfully, and she already wore something of the buxom rosiness which was considered appropriate to the wife of the host. Blind Molly had not accompanied her

mother. Samson had offered to keep the child with him, and the offer had been accepted. Tom had returned to find his old home shut up; but no other person had taken the place, nor was the scanty furniture he had placed in it removed. It was evident by the present look of the cottage that he intended living there once more. Perhaps Molly, who for all her blindness was a helpful little maiden, would be able to keep house for him if he desired to settle for a time.

Whilst his friends stood engrossed in conversation just outside, Tom finished the task in hand, and suddenly lifted himself up. No one was at that moment regarding him. Perhaps it would have taken a keener eye than any of those drink-dulled youths possessed to perceive the subtle change that had come over the blacksmith during his five months' absence. As he listened to the coarse profanity of the talk, recognising with a start of shame that it was just in this vein he himself had once spoken—only that he always surpassed his comrades in the force of his oaths and the recklessness of his blasphemy—a change passed over his face, the features seemed to sharpen, the eyes flashed strangely in their deep caverns. His face was a good deal sunken, as though with some kind of physical or mental strain; yet he did not appear in any way enfeebled or weakened, and his voice rang out clear and strong as he suddenly advanced upon his companions.

'Swear not at all,' he said, 'for heaven is God's throne, and earth is His footstool; and for every idle word which we speak, we shall one day be called upon to give account.'

A roar of laughter greeted these words. To hear Tom mimicking the Methodist preacher was rich in the extreme. Luke Crowder slapped him delightedly upon the back.

'Tom, old man, it *is* good to have you back. Why, bless you, my boy, you bring new life with you. You cannot guess what a wretched hole this has been since you left it. If we do not all get merrily drunk to-night in honour of your return, call me a liar.'

But Tom withdrew himself from the friendly greetings of his companions, all interlarded as they were with words which cannot be written in these pages; and instead of joining in the laugh which Luke's words had raised, and which his own frowning severity increased (for it was looked upon as a bit of fine acting on old Tom's part), he stood very still and upright until there was silence again, and then he spoke in short incisive sentences.

'My—friends, as I would fain call you still, only that I may not call them friends who are at open enmity with the Master I serve—I beseech you leave off this vile and wicked habit of evil and profane swearing. It sears the conscience like a hot iron, and crucifies afresh the Lord of Glory, putting Him to an open shame. Cease to do evil—learn to do well. I tell you, friends, that you are walking blindfold into the abyss of perdition. Your souls are lost eternally if you turn not aside from your evil ways. Turn, then, and repent, and do the thing that is right, for that alone can bring a man peace at the last.'

Gaping, astonished, unspeakably disgusted, the little knot of men fell back a pace, and stood staring upon Tom with wide-open eyes and gaping mouths. Then Michael Portway—the most decent and respectable of the lot, whose mother had always held him back from any very wild conduct or open profanity—ventured to put a question or two, to discover if this new phase were anything but a trick on the part of the young smith, who had ever been the leading spirit in anything evil or reckless. But Tom's stern uncompromising answers soon left no doubt as to that, and the rebuked and astonished youths slunk away, muttering ugly words, more disappointed and disgusted than they well knew how to express.

The sound of voices had drawn Samson from the forge itself towards the open shed where the horses were shod, and he heard the whole of the brief dialogue which had caused Tom's visitors to slink away in deep disgust. When

they had gone the elder man came forth and laid a hand on Tom's arm, saying, in kindly tones,—

'Have a care, lad, that thou dost not needlessly affront those who would gladly be thy friends.'

'I may not hold friendly commune with those who blaspheme the name of my Saviour with every breath they draw,' answered Tom quickly.

'But thou mayest speak them gently and kindly, I trust, remembering that not long since thou wert as one of them thyself.'

'Ay, there is the bitterness, the terrible anguish of my life, which nothing can ever take away. I was worse than any of them—the chief of sinners. Must I not then be tenfold more forward to rebuke those same sins, seeing how I led them forward in my unconverted days?'

'Ay, ay, lad, I read thy meaning. Thou wouldest make amends for the past by eager service in the future; but thou must not forget that it is not by harsh rebukes that thou wilt win thy way and lead thy comrades onward. Thou must have patience; thou must remember how hard these things are to be understood. Thinkest thou that thou wouldest have been thus won, had men done naught but set before thee the evil of thy ways, had done naught but rebuke and condemn thee?'

'It was rebukes that broke my heart!' cried Tom, his dark eyes flashing strangely; 'it was seeing myself walking ever forward to hell-fire that caused me to pause, to turn away in fear, to inquire what I might do to be saved. What good to preach the gospel of the Crucified One's love to men who blaspheme His holy Name each time they open their lips? Nay, first show them the need for a Saviour. Show them the host of hell—the living fires, the undying worm; then, perchance, but not till then, will they strive to flee from the wrath to come. Conviction of sin must first come; perchance, then, it may be followed by pardon and peace.'

Samson passed his hand across his face with something of

a puzzled expression. He was not altogether ignorant of the phrases which were becoming gradually to be almost like the catch-words of a party ; but he had been born and bred in a different school, and, whilst respecting genuine earnestness whenever he was convinced of it, he was by no means certain that Tom's teachers had been entirely successful with this new disciple of theirs. He was genuinely rejoiced to see the change effected in Tom's character and manner of life, but he was considerably puzzled by a good deal that he saw in his headstrong nephew. It was characteristic of him to 'go the whole hog,' as the modern phrase is ; but zeal is all the better for being tempered with discretion.

'Thee must remember, lad, that all folks are not cut to one pattern,' he said ; 'some may want driving and skeering a bit, but there be others as can only be led by gentler ways. I'm no hand at talking of such things myself, but it do seem to me as it can never be wrong to speak first of the love of the Lord. I think, if I were He, I would sooner have folks coming to me because I'd bidden them love me and come to me, than because they were skeered out of their lives at the thought of going to hell-fire. It seems to me that some of your Methodist friends (of whom I would speak with all respect) go about, as we plain folks say, putting the cart before the horse ; but maybe they know best.'

'Ay, indeed they do know best!' cried Tom with eager impetuosity, his face darkening as he heard even this small criticism upon the method of his teachers. 'Uncle, how can thee know ? What hast thou ever learnt ? What do any of us know here in Sax ? Look round, and what do we see ? From the great house yonder down to the lowest cabin all the same story—drinking, swearing, gaming, the Sabbaths profaned by cruel and impious sports, men spending all their superfluity upon their own vile appetites ; rioting by day and night, no shepherd to feed them, no guiding hand to lead them, none to point out how all alike are hurrying on to the pit of destruction. Oh, if thee had

been with me in York thee would speak very differently! What had we there? Huge gatherings Sabbath by Sabbath of hungry souls craving the word of life. Strong men falling down as helpless as babes when conviction of sin pierced them through and through. Why, upon the blessed day when Mr. Wesley himself came amongst us, his voice at length could scarce be heard for the groans and cries of those cut to the heart by his words; and again and again he had to stop to pray for this soul or that, ere it could be set free from the bondage of Satan. And when thus freed, oh, the joy, the blessedness, the thanksgiving! And I remained to see hundreds gathered to the fold, all of one heart and one mind, meeting often together for prayer and praise, following in all things the steps of their great leader, fasting oft, denying themselves all but the bare necessities of life, that all else they had might be given to the poor; the women modestly arrayed—however rich in this world's goods—in plain and sad-coloured garments, the men forswearing every indulgence, and walking soberly and righteously before the Lord. And yet thou strivest to set thine own opinion above that of these holy men from the midst of whom I come! Verily, uncle, methinks that thou must be in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. What was done for me by thee when I was so long with thee? If thou hadst the word of life and salvation, why didst thou keep it back from me?’

Samson said no more. Argument was not his forte. He scratched his head with an air of perplexity, and suggested that they should go in to dinner. To dinner they went, but Tom only swallowed a hunch of dry bread, washing it down with a draught of cold water, refusing almost fiercely the glass of home-brewed ale his uncle would have pressed upon him. So soon as he had bolted this meagre repast he retired to his own cottage, where he had already elected to take up his abode; and his uncle was very sure that he had locked himself in there to read his Bible and engage in prayer.

The days following were days of considerable perplexity to the worthy Samson, and of seething excitement to the whole of Sax.

Tom was back amongst them, but Tom was a Methodist ! The thing seemed too incongruous to be true, and the whole place, as Glegg had it, was set by the ears. Upon the first Sunday following his return, Tom tramped off to Hownston, to join a Methodist service there early in the day ; and in the afternoon, when the youths of the village met upon the green just outside the place, to indulge in the favourite sport of baiting a young bull belonging to Nat Crowder, who found the sport conducive to the after-sale of liquor, behold ! there was Tom, Bible in hand, standing upon an eminence in the centre of the green—close to the stake to which the bull was habitually tied. As soon as his old comrades appeared, he commenced reading from the Scriptures the most hotly denunciatory passages to be found there, and it was very plain he intended to keep his position ; while no one altogether cared for the task of attempting to dislodge him from the vantage ground he had taken up. In old days it had always been reported with pride that Tom could fell an ox with a blow of his fist ; and although there was a tradition to the effect that Methodists did not fight, nobody wanted to run the risk of receiving a knock-down blow from the blacksmith's arm. Then the novelty of the entertainment drew many round him to listen ; and though he did not attempt to do more than read, and afterwards to sing a hymn, he kept a small and attentive congregation about him all the time, and those who held the bull were forced presently to take the beast home unbaited.

But proceedings such as this were so unheard of in Sax as to arouse the keenest excitement.

'If madam were at home we should soon see things put down with a high hand,' said Glegg, shaking his head wisely ; 'young Tom had better take care how he goes on. Neither madam nor yet the squire will put up with this sort o' thing.

If he dare try it agin next Sunday, I'll go and argify with un myself. I'll tell un what I think of boys as has been a disgrace to an honest village going and setting themselves up as preachers and teachers. I'll sen un home with a flea in his ear, that I will.'

So spoke Glegg; and, accordingly, the next Sunday was looked forward to as eagerly as though some prize cock-fight were to be witnessed that day.

Of course the return of the prodigal, and the extraordinary change in him, were duly reported to Mr. Latham, who took an early opportunity of calling upon this remarkable parishioner of his, to see if at this crisis of his life he could be of any assistance to him.

His call was made after working hours, when Tom was likely to be at home in his cottage; but when the clergyman knocked at the door, it was opened by blind Molly, who said that her brother had shut himself up, as was now usual with him on his return from the forge, in his own room, and she was plainly afraid of disturbing him.

Mr. Latham sat down and talked to the child. He was glad to find that Tom was still kind and gentle to her always, though she was a good deal perplexed and a little distressed because he told her almost every day that, until she was converted, she could not hope to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and that she could not be converted until she had been convinced of sin. Little Molly, however, had received other teaching from Mr. Latham and the lady of Ernscliff, and though sometimes perplexed by Tom's words and arguments, was not seriously disturbed, nor afraid that Jesus would refuse her love because she had never felt absolutely weighed to the ground by the sense of her sins. She could not argue with Tom, who was very vehement if contradicted, but it was a relief to her to speak out freely to Mr. Latham; and he stroked her soft curly hair, and bid her never doubt the love of the Good Shepherd, who gathered the lambs with His arm and carried them in His bosom, and had said in

His own gracious and tender words, too clear to be misunderstood, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in nowise cast out,' without prescribing any special method by which that soul should come.

'The wish to come is a sign of faith,' said the clergyman, smiling; 'for why should we wish to do so if we had not belief in our Saviour? And if we know Him as our Redeemer, we cannot approach without a sense of humble penitence for the sins which have kept us away, or have clouded our communion with Him. You, my dear child, have felt all this, I know. Fear not but that Christ looks upon the heart, and draws each according to His will. Some, it may be, have need to fall before Him in deepest affliction and abasement; but sure it is not for us to strive to keep away those who approach with greater confidence, if this confidence be the humble trust of a little child. Truth, my little girl, is found in every creed, in every section of God's holy Catholic Church, and let us respect and honour that truth wherever we see it, giving it all credence and reverence, even though in our hearts we know that it is but a part of a great and mysterious whole. And now go and ask your brother if he will give me speech for a few minutes, and run away to your good uncle's. I am glad you still remain beneath his roof, though it is well you spend half your time with your brother likewise.'

Molly glided from the room and up the staircase, where voices were presently heard in confabulation. Then she returned with downcast mien and faltering speech.

'I pray your pardon, sir, but Tom will not come down. These hours he gives to prayer and the study of the Bible. "He will not be interrupted for anybody," he says.'

'I am glad he is so well occupied,' answered Mr. Latham mildly; 'I should be pleased if I could in any way assist him in his studies. Perhaps another time I may be more fortunate.'

Molly coloured vividly as she replied,—

‘That is what I said, that you would help him better than anybody, but—but——’

‘Well, my child, do not be afraid to speak.’

‘But he said he had better teachers, and wanted no help from the clergy. He bid me ask you not to come again, nor to trouble him by—by—oh, pardon me, sir!—by your false doctrine. Poor Tom does not understand. He——’

‘My child, the fault is less with him than with us,’ answered Mr. Latham gently and sorrowfully; ‘it is but too true that we have been faithless shepherds, blind leaders of the blind, and we are but reaping what we have sown. In time, please God, we shall recover our hold over our flock; but for the present we must wait in patience and faith. Do not weep, little one; you have much to be thankful for in the conversion of your brother. Some day, perhaps, he will learn to look upon me as a friend instead of a foe.’

Had the lady of Ernscliff heard of this repulse of the curate, Tom wondered, when, two days later, she reined in her horse at the forge to speak a few kind words to the young smith, who coloured crimson as he came forward to return her greeting. There was something in the grave sweetness of her face and the questioning glance of her clear eyes that was not all approval; yet her words were very kind, and they brought a throb of gladness to Tom’s heart. After she had passed he upbraided himself for that throb, and remembered that this fair woman had worn a rich gold clasp to her riding-hood, and that her habit was of velvet, which ill-beseemed those who would follow the footsteps of the saints; and he withdrew himself more and more from the companionship of others, and gave himself to fasting and prayer, that he might be cleansed from every sinful passion and every unholy thought.

The Sunday encounter between Tom and Glegg was exciting enough to satisfy all listeners. Glegg took the line of biting sarcasm against upstarts and false preachers; Tom that of vehement denunciation of faithless shepherds and

reckless evil-livers. Neither paid great attention to the arguments of the other, but spoke in turns, launching anathemas, and neither giving nor asking quarter. The battle raged for an hour. Each disputant believed he had come off victorious, and public opinion in the village was divided on that point. As Tom strode away, hot and fierce from the encounter, he was stopped by the bailiff of Rookwood, who had always been well-disposed towards him.

‘Have a care, young man!’ he said, ‘for madam and the family will be home very shortly; and if you wish to stay here in Sax, you will have to turn over a new leaf. Take my word for it, madam will have no Methodists on the estate. You will have to give up either your living or your new notions,’ and with a kindly nod the man strode away without waiting to hear Tom’s reply.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TUG OF WAR.

‘**N**O!’ shouted Fulk Fortescue, bursting into a loud laugh. ‘That’s just a little too great a strain on our credulity, old fellow! Tom Heron a Methodist! why, Saul among the prophets was nothing to it! What mean you, George, by such a wild tale?’

‘Wild or not, it is true enough,’ answered Captain Fortescue, who was leaning negligently upon the balustrade of the terrace, and regaling his sister and cousins with various items of home news, strange to them from their long absence in Bath. The travellers had reached Rookwood at noon that day, and had found George there before them, ready to escort his sister home when she should be recovered from the fatigues of the journey. The pair had, however, easily been persuaded to remain for a few days, the guests of the squire. George was home on leave for a time, and both Fulk and Hugh were pleased to have his company. Athol, too, had come to be looked upon by madam almost as a daughter, and she felt that it would be a very dull thing to be left with only Irene as her companion. It had been hard enough to leave behind all the gaieties and pleasures of Bath; to lose her vivacious niece at the same time would make matters much worse. Both Athol and George were ready enough to accept this invitation. They were fond of Rookwood, and very much at home there. The April weather was lovely, hot and balmy, and full of sweet scents and sounds. To two amongst the little group

upon the terrace the change from town to country life was very agreeable.

But for the moment George's words had arrested universal attention. The captain nodded his head and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

'Poor beggar! I do not know how they got hold of him. People say he was hurt in the burning of an old inn in Pound Lane, just after the execution of the rebels last November. I know he was in York then, for I saw him at the spectacle, apparently enjoying it as much as anybody. A few weeks later I came across him acting champion to some dirty little ranter, and knocking down with his sledge-hammer fists any person who attempted to interfere with him. The first time I thought it must be just a mad freak; but when it happened again before my very eyes, I made my way to him and tried to chaff him in the old style, whereupon he turned round and rebuked me publicly, using all the canting phrases which are the catch-words of the Methodists, so far as I can make out. After that I gave him up. I suppose, if the truth were known, the poor fellow went a little off his head, and they took advantage of him, and got him to think himself converted, or whatever is their stock word for it. Of course it won't last. He's too good a fellow to be permanently spoiled, but the attack seems to be a severe one.'

'What has become of him now?' asked Fulk, with interest. 'We can't spare Tom Heron. He's much too valuable. Why, I have some splendid young cocks just coming to their prime. I was going to see Tom about them at once. There's nobody can train birds as he can, or make and fit on their spurs. We must put an end to this new nonsense as fast as may be.'

'Oh, I don't think there will be much trouble there,' answered the captain, laughing. 'Tom came back to Sax last month, and has had a pretty stiff time of it, to judge by his looks. Why, one would hardly know him now—he has

fallen away in flesh, fasting, I suppose, and is hollow-eyed and cadaverous. He hardly speaks a word, bad or good, to a soul in the place, shutting himself up, so his uncle tells me, from bad and good alike. Don't quite know what he thinks about the folks that are reckoned here to be good, for he keeps as much aloof from Mr. Latham and honest old Samson as he does from the Crowders and his old boon companions. The fellow is just a little mad—that is the long and short of it; but there will be a turn of the tide one of these days, and he will come back to us, the same fine fellow as he once was. It is the way with fanatics; they drive everything too hard. They find out it is all a great mistake, and then they come back with new relish to old amusements and sports. I'm not a bit afraid of losing Tom permanently.'

Athol stole a look at Irene. She was listening intently, her breath coming and going. Athol was well aware that her cousin was, to all intents and purposes, a Methodist, though in secret, and that she had no intention of telling her parents anything about her changed views. The thing was not pleasant to the frank and outspoken nature of the elder girl; but Irene considered that she was justified in her own course of action, and had many quotations from Scripture to use in argument, so Athol had long ceased to urge her upon the matter. She fancied that Hugh knew, and possibly he might help his timid sister to greater frankness. At least it was no business of hers, and Athol had plenty to think about without this.

It was towards Hugh that Irene's eyes were now turned, as if asking him to speak. Hugh was a quiet fellow at home, but he and Fulk were great friends, despite the dissimilarity of their ways and their characters. Irene was sometimes vexed and disappointed at seeing the warm regard they had for each other, and was disposed to condemn Hugh as one of those careless youths who, taking up the clerical profession for a living, have no intention of

leading anything that could be reasonably called a consecrated life.

'I'd have a care what I was about with Tom Heron,' said Hugh, who was listening to the talk with interest. 'I remember the fellow very well; there was always something volcanic about him—something not altogether to be depended upon in his composition. A man like that often astonishes his friends by developments in unexpected directions. From what George says, he appears to have taken up his Methodism in a very peculiar fashion; he is evidently running his head against a wall of some sort, and will almost certainly meet with a recoil backwards; but all the same, I'd have a care, if I were you, how you tempt him back deliberately into his old wild ways. One knows how it is with men of that calibre; they must be always in one extreme or the other—at least that is their nature. Possibly in time they may learn moderation and temperance in its highest sense, but the growth must be slow, and will not easily be attained. Vehemence and violent alternations between one extreme and another is the thing that is natural to them. If Tom Heron is overdoing his attempt to break away from his old ways, the natural recoil will come of itself later on, and the poor fellow will have a hard enough time of it then without any assistance from you, Fulk.'

'Oh, come, Hugh, don't you take the airs of a half-fledged parson yet, and one of these new-fangled parsons, too!' cried Fulk, laughing. 'You don't seriously suppose that I should do Tom any harm?'

Hugh looked steadily at his brother with an expression of gravity and affection, which made his face older than his years.

'I should be afraid to say,' he answered; 'I know you would not mean to do him harm, but what do you yourself seriously think of all this Sunday cock-fighting, and the dissipation and gambling to which it leads?'

'Oh, don't listen to him!' cried George, laughing and

pulling Fulk by the arm. 'Hugh has shut himself up with his books at Oxford till he does not know what life is like. My good fellow, one can only be young once, and gentlemen can be trusted to amuse themselves without turning blackguards or throwing away their souls. Come on, Fulk; I want you to look at the new horse I bought in your absence. Leave Hugh to finish his lecture to the ladies. We will deal with Tom Heron after our own fashion. If Hugh knows more of books than we do, at least we know more of men than he.'

Fulk was easily led away, and George had great influence with him at the moment, though when he was absent from him Hugh might possibly acquire the ascendancy. The younger brother did not attempt to interfere, but after standing for a few minutes in a brown study he said,—

'I think I will stroll down to the village and have a look round the old place. It is a long time since I saw it.'

Years made little change in Sax, and Hugh found that he recognised every landmark and every face as distinctly as though he had only left the place yesterday. Turning to the right as he quitted the park for the main street of the village, he glanced with affectionate interest at the old church, which he one day thought might be his especial charge, and wandered slowly along till he reached the bridge and heard the sounds of voices, some loud and almost angry, others laughing and jeering, others again friendly and cajoling, but all, as it seemed, raised more or less in argument, and addressed to the same person, who, it appeared, had little to say in reply.

These sounds proceeded from the direction of the forge and the open shed at the side. Hugh's interest was at once aroused, and he stepped forward till he found himself just without the knot of more or less excited speakers. It was as he supposed. Tom's old friends and associates were gathered about him, trying to persuade him to some course of action against which he appeared to have set himself.

The bone of contention appeared to be a large jug of foaming ale, which Luke Crowder was holding up before him.

'Thee mother sent it thee, Tom,' he kept vociferating in eager accents; 'thee mother sent it with her love. She can't abear to see thee going about looking as thee does. She bid us beg thee to drink it, if thee loved her and called thyself her son. It be a strange religion as won't let a man please his old mother and do his own health good. Beside, Glegg here says, as St. Paul said, as men were to drink a drop of something stronger than water for their stomick's sake. We shan't think much o' thy religion if thee won't obey neither thee own mother nor yet the Bible neither.'

'Thee be bringing the Methodists into greater contempt than ever, Tom Heron,' said old Glegg, standing forward and swelling himself out, as he always did when making a speech; 'not as I be one that wishes it otherwise, for I hate 'em all—nasty low vermin—but I know that thee means well, and I'd like to put some sense into thy head if I could. The Lord gave us the grape and all other good things, and says that He gives wine to make glad the heart of man, and surely thee doesn't set up for being wiser nor He? Didn't He turn water into wine His own self, and drink wine with His disciples before He went to be crucified? Bless you all, what fools yon Methodies must be if they know their Bibles so little as that!—and what poor mean souls they must have if they can be so easy damned as that a drink of good malt ale will damn them! I tell thee, Tom Heron, if this heaven of thine is such a queer place as thee makes it out to be; if folks can be kept out for making use of the creatures the good God gives them to use, why' (with an oath), 'I should never care to get to it! It can't be a place worth going to at all!'

A murmur of applause went round the ring; but Tom's eyes flashed beneath their cavernous brows. He was looking very ill and worn, though the muscles on his arms still stood out like knotted cords, and his movements had lost

none of their old force. He lifted himself suddenly up and faced Glegg fiercely ; for in him he felt he had an adversary worthy of his steel.

‘Take heed how thou blasphemest, thou blind-eyed old man ! Thou who lovest to cast the stumbling-block of iniquity before the feet of others, and to spread cords and traps for the unwary. Because that the Lord’s mercies are great, and even the dying thief who had committed murder and theft found mercy at the last, and was admitted within the gates of Paradise, will you urge men to commit like crimes because they may even yet find mercy ? These creatures which you say God has given, but which men have used for the devil’s work, are accursed—accursed, I say, for the evil they have done. Their use, their lawful use, is perverted ; men sell their souls for drink ; they make themselves lower than the very beasts that perish ; they follow strong drink in the morning, and in the evening wine inflames them, and they lie grovelling like brutes in the mire of their iniquity. Do I not know ? Have I not tasted the bitterness of that degradation ? Have I not repented in dust and ashes, and vowed myself from henceforth a Nazarite unto the Lord ? Shall I break this vow to please such men as these—men that know not their right hand from their left ; that would sell themselves to the devil himself, did he but give them the wherewithal to gratify their bestial appetites ? Go, I say ; tempt me no more. I will none of it. God has wiped out my sins ; they are blotted from His book. Shall I in gratitude to Him for His great mercy plunge once again into sin to please the likes of you ?’ The wild gleam of Tom’s eyes caused many in the ring round him to fall back discomfited and dismayed. Seeing this, Tom made a step forward and took from Luke’s hand the jug of ale, crying aloud as he did so, ‘See here ! This is how I accept my mother’s gift,’ and as he spoke he hurled the tankard across the road, spattering its contents freely upon the clothes of the group around him, whilst the vessel itself was shattered

into a hundred fragments as it reached the ground. The little crowd melted instantly away in profound disgust ; and, to his surprise, Tom found himself confronted by a young gentleman, whose face seemed familiar to him, although for a moment he failed to identify it, who approached with a smile, wiping from his coat cuff a few drops of the spilled ale.

‘Well, Tom,’ he said kindly, ‘it is some time since we met. I am glad to hear that you have turned over a new leaf since then. We were all rather wild together once, I fear. I remember many pranks of which I do not feel proud now. I have learned to see things differently as I have grown older, and I am glad to hear that you have done the same.’

The light of excitement had died out of Tom’s eyes ; his face had taken a look of aloofness that suggested sullenness.

‘I ask your pardon, Mr. Hugh ; I did not see that you were near. I am sorry to have stained your cloth. I thank you for your kindly words, but I will have no kindness under false pretences. I am a Methodist now, and they tell me that when madam hears it I shall be turned neck and crop out of the old home I have lived in all my life. It is scarce fitting that any son of hers should speak with the likes of me.’

‘Pooh, Tom, my man ! we were all lads together. I do not deny that my mother will be displeased to hear of this new profession ; but if you would, out of deference to her, moderate your language slightly, whilst retaining all your improved principles, and we were to speak to her in your favour, I doubt not——’

‘Ye cannot serve God and mammon,’ interrupted Tom harshly, ‘nor yet two masters. Madam has chosen to set herself up to judge the children of light and to condemn godly men. I dare not hold my peace from rebuking evil when I see it at any command of hers.’

‘Our conscience must always be our guard and guide,’

answered Hugh with great forbearance, considering the tone adopted by the young smith; 'but it is wise to avoid giving needless offence, and bringing our cause into disfavour with others through a lack of Christian sympathy with our less enlightened brothers.'

Tom turned almost rudely away.

'I do not think we shall ever understand each other, Mr. Hugh. You are being bred up for the Church, the family living. I am a poor soldier and servant, unversed in your strange arguments, which make evil good and good evil. I only know what my Bible bids me—to be instant in season and out of season. Alas! it is always out of season in this unhappy place, whose rulers rise up and take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed! But I must do my duty in spite of all. If they persecute you in one place, shake off the dust of your feet for a testimony against them, and fly to another. That may be my fate soon; but I know not and I care not. I am in the Lord's hands. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."'

Without another word, bad or good, Tom swung himself away and shut himself up in his own room, after his manner; whilst Hugh looked after him with a compassionate expression upon his face.

'Poor fellow,' he said, 'he is terribly in earnest; but he is cutting himself off from everything and everybody. Human nature cannot stand that strain. There will be a fearful reaction one of these days, if I am not mistaken in the man.'

The family at Rookwood having returned, Tom expected every day to receive notice to quit his cottage; but that notice did not come. As a matter of fact, the election impending in the autumn made land-owners very chary of offending public opinion in any way. The Herons were an old family in the place; Tom had been an immense favourite, and the squire only laughed aloud when he heard of his having turned Methodist, and warned his sons and daughter,

and even the servants, not to trouble madam with the news. Madam had guests at the house, and was not likely to trouble her head over village gossip, unless it was prominently forced upon her. The squire declared his confidence in 'Tom's pulling through all right,' and coming out a sober fellow after the fit had expended itself. There was no such farrier within ten miles as Tom Heron, and he was the best horse and dog-doctor in the whole neighbourhood. For a man who loved sport as the squire did this was no small recommendation. Having lost one hunting season by reason of his gout and his wife's desire to winter in Bath, he had no intention of foregoing another, and he did not wish Tom driven from Sax before the season came on. His Methodism did not prevent his plying his trade with his old skill, and that was all the squire cared about.

And now Tom found a very different sort of trial awaiting him. He had looked to encounter opposition, ridicule, abuse, and hatred. He had met all unflinchingly. He had gone his own way, rebuking, exhorting, condemning, an outcast of men, as he phrased it to himself, a scorn and reproach of all that were round about. He had expected this, and had nerved himself for it, and had set himself in an attitude of such hostility towards his former comrades that neither their blandishments nor their gibes really touched him, and he was not seriously tempted by any act of theirs to forsake the course he had adopted.

He looked for the same sort of thing from the gentlemen on their return, railing and abuse, though perhaps of a different calibre, and a great deal of ridicule, which he felt it would be hard enough to bear; but, to his surprise, and it must be owned, his relief also, for he was growing to feel desperately lonely, and at times weary even to the verge of exhaustion, there was nothing of this kind to be encountered. The young men, riding to and fro past the forge, would rein in their horses as of old for a bit of a chat; and though they took it for granted that his views had

changed, and no longer invited him to share their sports, they never made him feel cut off from them by any line of demarcation. The first horse at Rookwood which fell lame was immediately put under his care, and daily visits there became necessary for some time to come.

In a large stable there is generally some animal or another in need of attendance; this summer there was a good deal of influenza amongst the squire's horses, and Tom was in constant requisition. The young gentlemen would constantly come to consult with him over a sick animal; the grooms and stable helps were always glad to see him. They did not resent it when he rebuked them for swearing. The gentlemen even began to curb their tongues in his presence, and Tom often felt as though he had some mission before him—to convert the godless in this great house, and bring them to a knowledge of their sins. Gradually the gloom vanished from his face, his manner became less aloof and more friendly. Often he remembered afterwards that he had heard loose language without remembering to check it; and though he upbraided himself for oversight, he did not realise that he was growing more callous to the sound of oaths and expletives. More than once he had been tempted in a moment of forgetfulness or absorption to drink a glass of ale which somebody had given him; and finding that no clouding of the faculties or desire for more was engendered, he began to wonder if he had not been a little over-strict with himself. His common-sense told him that there could be no deadly sin in the act; with him it was not even any particular self-indulgence, as a love for strong drink of any kind was very little developed. He did not think his own guides and counsellors would blame him. He was as zealous as ever in attending all Methodist gatherings, and spent every Sunday of his life at Hownston, to be present at all he could. He denied himself all but the bare necessities of life in order to contribute to the fund for building a chapel in that place; and

he did not for a moment suspect himself of any lapse in faith or conviction. He was a converted Methodist, who knew himself as saved. Had it not been told him again and again that for such as him the life of 'sinless perfection' was no idle form of words, but was a thing absolutely enjoyed by them?

One day a strange thing happened to him at Rookwood. He was there very early one morning, for the delicate Arab barb generally ridden by Irene had fallen ill, and he had spent the best part of the night watching and tending it. He was quite alone with the pretty creature in the large loose box, when the door opened softly, and the owner of the horse herself appeared. The young lady looked timidly round her, and then glided softly up to the farrier. She held in her hand a case, which she opened before his astonished eyes, and he saw that it contained a pearl necklace of considerable value.

'Tom Heron,' whispered the lady, 'I have brought these to you. I want you to sell them, and give the money to the Methodist chapel at Hownston. I am a Methodist at heart, as you are, but I dare not do this thing openly. Will you do it for me, for the cause?'

'I will,' answered Tom, his eyes lighting with surprise and pleasure. The next moment Irene had glided away, and he was left with only the necklace in his hand to show that it was not all a dream.

CHAPTER XV.

RELAPSED.

SPRING had given place to summer, and summer was waning into autumn, when Tom Heron began to feel that his present life was well-nigh intolerable, and that if he could not mend matters somewhat he should be driven to distraction.

This conviction did not come suddenly upon him; it was of slow growth, and was not immediately recognised. Indeed, the young man fought hard against it, vowing that he had within himself that which rendered him independent of all outward aids to happiness; yet all the same a strange deadness was stealing over his spirit; the hours spent in meditation and prayer and the reading of the Scriptures dragged heavily along, and he often found his thoughts wandering almost regretfully back to the careless days of old, in which he had had friends and to spare, and had enjoyed life with that zest and fulness which is only possible to the young. Often he would throw aside his books, rise from his knees and dash out into the open air, striving to deaden the weary ache gnawing at his heart by violent physical exertion, and wandering about half the night before fatigue drove him home.

By day he worked at the forge, often with an energy that was almost ferocious; but it was seldom that the monotony of his toil was varied by any friendly greetings from old associates. These had at last given him up as a hopeless case, had almost ceased to be interested in him. At first Tom had said that he was glad when these visits

ceased, when he was neither cajoled nor ridiculed, but simply let alone. Now, however, he often felt that anything would be better than the complete isolation in which he found himself. Fighting of some kind was congenial to him, and standing up boldly for the righteousness of his cause had brought with it a sense of power and an exaltation of spirit which had carried him through many days and weeks of opposition that might have broken down the resolution of a weaker man. But all this was now a thing of the past. People had left off interesting themselves in the 'mad Methodist'; and whilst his foes had ceased their attacks from without, Tom had drawn no nearer to those who in the first days had made overtures of friendship towards him. Tom's curse through life had been a kind of wild, fierce shyness, which asserted itself in presence of certain individuals; generally, as it chanced, before the very persons with whom he would naturally have wished to stand well, and for whom he had a deep underlying respect. This shyness had been greatly intensified by the change which showed to him the evil of his past life, and had prompted him to reject with peremptory decision the gentle attempts of the lady of Ernscliff and Mr. Latham to win his confidence and trust.

It was another phase of the same feeling which made him so reserved towards his uncle, and had all but made little Molly a stranger to him now. He felt unworthy of the caresses of his little sister; shamed by the common-sense uprightness of the worthy blacksmith. His new ideas of religion were, as is so often the case with men of his stamp, suddenly aroused to a sense of sin, extraordinarily narrow. Because Samson, Mr. Latham, and other devout persons in Sax had never succeeded in producing any impression upon him, and because the Methodists had succeeded where others had failed, therefore Tom was absolutely certain that they, and they alone, held the truth; and more than this, he was equally certain that just those fragments of truth which had come home to his heart, and had served to awaken him from

his long sleep, comprised the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and he looked upon anything else as an addition of man, if not a work of the devil.

Strange as this form of bigotry seems when carefully analysed, it was common enough in those days, and is always so, indeed, to a greater or less extent. When Samson (who did not sit for nothing under Mr. Latham Sunday by Sunday) would try, in his own rough and sturdy way, to put before Tom some arguments tending to show that, whilst he was right in what he held, others might be right too, who did not take exactly the same line, the young man would grow first excited, and then fierce, and would be so certain that his uncle was acting as an emissary of the devil to tempt him from the paths of righteousness, that the worthy smith had given him up at last in despair, and Tom's isolation gradually became almost complete.

The only bright days for him were those upon which he went up to the great house, where he was always received by the young gentlemen and servants alike with friendly good-will and cordiality. This was the only place where he was not made to feel himself an outcast, and gradually he came to look upon the squire's house as the pleasantest spot in all the world. He ceased to be afraid that madam's displeasure would one day rise against him. He could not believe that she was in ignorance of his opinions, which had raised such a commotion in the place. Great as was the gulf which divided him from the family at Rookwood, Tom was something too much self-centred at this time to realise that his private affairs might be long in filtering down to madam's ears. Sometimes he even flattered himself (especially since Mistress Irene had paid that secret visit to the stable, and had given him the necklace) that his example was already bearing fruit in unexpected quarters. Poor Tom! his ignorance and his self-consciousness were alike natural to one in his position, and perhaps it was well for him that he had a few cheering thoughts and brighter

days, or his mind might have given way beneath the strain of loneliness and asceticism.

But, as the summer began to wane, a new disappointment and source of trouble came to Tom. Hitherto his Sundays had been happy days for him. He had spent them in Hownston amid those of his own way of thinking, and had returned refreshed and strengthened for the week about to commence.

The community at Hownston had grown and flourished; funds had been collected for the erection of a small chapel, and the building was rapidly rising. But, as was so often the case then, as in other times, with prosperity came disunion, jealousy, and dissension. The great split between the Calvinistic and Arminian Methodists penetrated in many places to small bodies, even to individual families; and before the summer had passed the little society at Hownston was divided against itself, and full of the most bitter hostility and enmity, each section vituperating the other, and forgetting everything but the great difference which was rending in some places the whole Methodist body into hostile camps.

With a dispute like this, Tom Heron had no kind of sympathy. He was no scholar, and the discussion of the exact signification of words and isolated texts had no kind of fascination for him. He listened in amaze whilst he heard those upon whom he had looked with veneration and respect hurling bitter words at one another, and mutually accusing each other of leading astray the souls who looked to them for guidance. Perplexed, distressed, grieved to the heart, Tom came away from a meeting which had been nothing but a vehement and scarcely disguised quarrel from first to last; and in his heart of hearts he almost said, as he threaded his way homewards through the winding woodland paths, 'Vanity of vanities—all is vanity.' He had given up everything for this beautiful faith which had seemed so strong—so holy—so all-embracing. There had been mercy even for him, as held out by his teachers; yet here were these same men, or their immediate followers, ready to fly at each other's

throats, and hurling passages of Scripture at one another as if they were deadly missiles, and all because, as it appeared to poor Tom, the words of the Bible could be read in many different ways, and there was no other guide to tell them what men should believe !

As this thought came into his mind, it seemed to Tom as though the solid ground gave way beneath his feet. Well might John Wesley, in later days, declare that it was Methodist alone who would greatly hurt Methodist ; that it was the strife within the community, not that from without, which would weaken the work, and alienate the flock. It had been nothing to Tom to be assailed from without. Rightly or wrongly, he had looked upon every argument as alleged by any person without the 'Connexion' as a weapon of Satan in some form or another, and had braced himself fearlessly for the assault ; but how, when those of his own way of thinking disagreed and vituperated one another ? How when each side could back their opinion from the same Bible ?—when it seemed as though, whichever side was right, God was made in some sort a liar. It was an awful, a fearful thought, and Tom's brain fairly reeled under the shock he had received. For he was a merciless reasoner in his own limited field, and when once this problem had suggested itself, he could do nothing but think of it by day and night, until he fell into a melancholy so profound that it was almost harder to bear than the old overwhelming conviction of sin under which he had laboured long ago.

And now he had no one to whom to go. He absolutely feared to consult those he would hitherto have sought, lest he should hear more of the wrangling which had already so unhinged him. Even his Bible seemed no comfort to him now, for there was always the terrible fear before him that its words might not be all true ; and how was he to distinguish the true from the false ? It was small wonder that he fell into deep depression at this time, and felt life absolutely unendurable ; so unendurable that it suddenly occurred to him

that the only thing to do was to marry, and see if companionship at home, and family responsibilities and cares, would not help him to forget his troubles, and be as other men are.

Anything was better than life in its present aspect. When the thought presented itself, Tom felt a thrill of unwonted pleasure, and marvelled that this solution of the difficulty had not presented itself before. He worked with unwonted satisfaction at his forge all day, and in the evening, leaving the Bible, which had already two days' accumulation of dust upon its cover, untouched upon the table, he smartened himself up as he had not done for long, stuck a flower in his button-hole, and sallied forth across the golden harvest fields to Sheepwold Farm, to see how Meg Dawson would receive him after his long absence. He had once or twice caught sight of her in the village since his return, but he had not attempted to address her. He had given up for the time all thoughts of yoking himself unequally with an unbeliever—as he had chosen to call poor Meg in his thoughts; but now he called to mind the farmer's leaning towards the preachings, and Meg's story of her sister Nanny's conversion. It might be that she herself was converted now, and in any case he felt strong enough to convert his own wife when once he had her in his hands.

Meg looked up with an air of great astonishment as Tom walked into the kitchen. He was such a stranger that the Dawsons had long ago given up all thoughts of seeing him there any more. Meg was woman enough to feel rather affronted at his sudden and entire desertion of her, although his attentions had at the best of times been spasmodic in character. So now she tossed her head, and made as if she hardly knew him; but Tom was too much preoccupied to notice her coolness, and like the great blundering fellow he was, plunged straight into the middle of his errand without taking any trouble to conciliate the girl first.

'Meg,' he said, 'I've come to have a bit of a talk with thee. Thee knows as I was thinking of making thee my

wife a matter of a year ago now ; and then something happened as made me think I was best alone in the world, and I've had other things to think of than marrying and giving in marriage. I tried to think it was better, as St. Paul advises, to stay as we were ; but it is not of commandment he says it, and we are free to marry if we choose. It may be weak of me, but I can't get on alone. I want somebody to be with me—to make home a bit home-like. And so, Meg, I've come to thee. I used to think as we should suit each other, and I thought thee had the same feeling. What does thee say now ? Will thee marry me next month ?'

'Well, I never !' cried Meg, her breath fairly taken away by the suddenness of this proposition, and then she suddenly flushed crimson, and her eyes looked anything but full of affection as she turned upon Tom rather fiercely. 'Thee be a nice fellow for a husband, Tom, that thee be ! Thee pretends thee cares for a girl a little bit, and tries to make her care for thee, and then thee goes away for a year, and never so much as comes near her. When the fancy takes thee, back thee comes, and wants to wed next week. What does thee think women are made of, Tom, if they will come and go at thy beck and call like that ?'

Tom opened his eyes in stupid, masculine surprise, and said nothing.

'Bah !' cried Meg, who had all this time been studying Tom's face pretty closely, finding it even more changed than she had expected. 'Thee has turned Methody since I saw thee last, Tom, and I hate the Methodies. Yes !' she cried, stamping her foot in a sudden access of fury, 'I hate them ; and I wouldn't marry thee now, not if thee was Squire of Rookwood. Nanny turned Methody, and she's never been the same since ; she's not a bit like a sister to me when I see her. She does naught but worry me about my soul, and bid me flee from the wrath to come. What business of hers is my soul ? And I don't think much of her Methody ways ; I think they make her a horrid hypocrite. I don't

think thee is a hypocrite, Tom, but folks do say as the way thee goes on is dreadful. I'd sooner be in my grave than thy wife. Thee'd better go courting among the Methodies, if thee wants a wife. I'd sooner marry Mike Portway, who's asked me three times already, only father don't think he has enough to keep me comfortable.'

And Meg tossed her head defiantly, glad to flaunt in Tom's face this new lover, and show him that other men had not been so blind or so tardy as he.

But Tom had only room in his head for one idea at a time.

'Then it comes to this, Meg—thee'll not marry a Methody?'

'Nay, that I won't!' cried the girl. 'I've seen enough of them and their ways. I can't abear the way they sets themselves up for saints. I liked thee better, Tom, before thee turned saint; and as for what they teach, father, who was a bit bitten by it once, says as he hears as good gospel from Mr. Latham in the church here as he does at Hownston from the Methodies. It isn't quite so rousing, but if he takes the trouble to listen, it's every bit as good. And I'm not going to be different from other folks to please nobody; so you may just go and choose a wife somewhere else. I'll have none of you.'

Tom rose to his feet to go. He was not one to play the ardent lover in face of such a dismissal; as he turned he saw that Janet Dawson was standing behind him, her face stern and severe.

'The lassie has spoken well, Tom Heron,' she said; 'thou art a vessel of wrath fore-ordained to perdition. Have I not always said it? I would not give my daughter to thee were it ever so. Hast thou not been a child of hell from thy youth?'

Tom made no attempt to reply, but turned and walked rapidly away. He was utterly rejected, for the very reason that he had turned from the paths of wickedness and become a changed character. Truly he was reaping a strange harvest from the seed sown in his heart.

A few days later madam herself sent for him to Rookwood. Tom was greatly surprised at the summons; but when he reached the house he found that it was on account of a favourite lap-dog that he had been sent for. Madam wished for his skill on behalf of the dog, whose leg had been broken by a kick from a horse.

The little creature was in madam's boudoir, and his mistress was with him. It was the first time that Tom had ever penetrated into the dwelling-rooms of the house, and he felt very sheepish and strange as his feet pressed the velvet carpet, and he found himself in an atmosphere of warm perfume and undreamed-of luxury. He was, however, bidden to come forward, and his skill and tenderness over the shivering little invalid did much to win madam's favourable notice. So, as he was bandaging up the injured limb, after it had been carefully set, she began to speak to him about himself.

'I hear, Tom, that you have turned over a new leaf, and have steadied down and become quite respectable,' she said graciously; 'and I am very glad to hear it. But I should like to see you at church on Sundays. I quite thought you would begin to attend since you left off your wild ways.'

In the presence of the elegant and softly spoken woman—for nobody could be more gracious than madam when she chose—Tom felt strangely tongue-tied and embarrassed. Instead of answering boldly, he muttered something about never having gone much to church; whereat madam smiled and said,—

'No, in past days we hardly looked for it; but you have turned over a new leaf now. And with so much evil going about in these days—dangerous persons calling themselves Methodists leading the ignorant and unwary from the beaten paths of truth—it is of the greater importance that——'

Tom had just finished binding the dog's leg, and he suddenly stood upright, flushing to the roots of his hair.

'Madam,' he said huskily, 'I am a Methodist myself. It

was the Methodists who saved me, body and soul. I do not go to church because I go to their meeting at Hownston. I thought you knew.'

Madam looked at him with a sharply contracted brow.

'A Methodist!' she exclaimed. 'You are mocking me, Tom Heron!'

'Madam, I should be mocking my God if I spoke not the truth. I have been a Methodist for nigh upon a year.'

'A Methodist!—and living upon the estate. How dared you so deceive us? Did you not know we gave out that no Methodists should be tenants of ours?'

'I heard something like it,' answered Tom. 'I looked to have notice to quit, but as it came not I thought——'

'It shall come, and that promptly, unless you will amend your ways,' said madam haughtily. 'Tom Heron, I speak for your own good; forget this idle and profane trifling, and stay in your old home. We will not disturb you if you will give up this new folly.'

'Give up my God to please man, madam! Who is profane now?' quoth hot-headed Tom.

Madam's hand was upon the bell, and she rang it sharply. To be defied and insulted in her own house by a common blacksmith was just a little too much! Tom was driven forth ere he could say another word. Before the day had passed the bailiff had come down to his house to give him notice to quit within the week.

So this was the end of it all, thought Tom, as he sat with his head buried in his hands by his fireless grate that night. He had given up all—friends, pleasures, pastimes, love of kindred, the things that make life sweet to the young; all, all, he had renounced, and what had he gained? The scorn of all his former associates, the hatred of the whole village. He had been cast off for his religion by the woman he hoped to wed, and now he was thrust forth from the home where he had lived from childhood for the same cause. And what had he left? His teachers? They were tearing each other

to pieces in argument; they had no thought to spare for him. His Bible? How was he to know how to read it aright, when its teachings set men at open war one with another? His prayers and meditations? Tom shuddered as he realised how cold, how lifeless, how formal these had grown. What had he left to cling to? At that moment he felt as though he had nothing—as though he stood alone in a black world, deserted by friend and foes alike, an outcast from the face of the earth, whilst the heavens were as brass above him, and God—if indeed there were a God—had turned His face away.

How long he sat there in loneliness and despair he knew not; but the touch of a hand upon his shoulder caused him suddenly to look up, and by the dull light of the taper he saw the friendly face of Michael Portway bending over him.

‘Tom, old fellow, cheer up!’ cried Mike, who was in secret a great admirer of Tom; ‘thy mother has just heard what has happened, and she bid me come to thee, and bid thee to supper with her. Do’ee come, lad, ’twill do thee good; and a man’s mother is his mother, and it hurts her feelings that thee should turn agin her as thee has done. Thee don’t eat enough to keep body and soul together; thee’s as spare and lean as can be. Thee’ll be ill one of these days if thee doesn’t change thy ways a bit. Come, Tom, do.’

Almost to the surprise, but greatly to the relief, of Michael, Tom rose quickly to his feet, and grasped the hand of his comrade hard in his, saying, with something of a gasp,—

‘Ay, I’ll go with thee, I’ll go with thee, lad. Don’t leave me. I can stand it no longer. Fetch all the other boys; we’ll have a night of it together. I’ve tried the other way, and it’s no go. Let me be happy whilst I can!’

Tom’s wild laugh startled Michael, but the smith hurried him along the road at breathless speed. That night all Sax was electrified by the news that Tom Heron the Methodist had gone on the drink again; and before a week had passed by the whole place rang with the story of a madder outbreak than had been known before, even in his wildest days.

CHAPTER XVI.

MADAM'S DISCOVERY.

‘SO much for the Methodists and their doctrines! said madam.

This remark had been heard from the lips of that lady more than once since Tom Heron's last wild outbreak, which had considerably transcended anything of the kind hitherto committed by him; but in the words as uttered to-day there appeared to be an especial significance; and as she swept into Mrs. Bridget's drawing-room, with that rustle of silken skirts which seemed inseparable from any movement on madam's part, Athol saw at a glance that something of an unwonted nature had occurred to excite her aunt, and both she and Mrs. Bridget rose to their feet with interest, as they greeted their kinswoman and visitor.

Madam's winter visits to her brother-in-law's rectory were not at all numerous, but this bright, crisp December day had tempted her as far as Hownston. She had had shopping to do in the town, and had dined at the rectory an hour or two earlier. After this she had gone once more into the town, returning for a cup of Mrs. Bridget's excellent tea to refresh her for the long drive home; and it was upon this second entrance that she showed in her look and manner that she had met with some adventure of an arousing kind.

‘What is it, dear aunt?’ asked Athol eagerly, greatly wondering how madam could have met with any encounter from the Methodists, who were quiet enough in their ways, save that on Sundays and sometimes in the evenings, if

weather permitted, there were open-air gatherings more or less largely attended.

Madam sank down in her easy chair, her silken skirts falling gracefully round her, and from the ample muff she carried she drew forth a packet wrapped in soft paper, which she placed in Athol's hands.

'I think you will recognise the contents, my dear,' she said. 'Open it and see.'

Athol obeyed, and uttered a cry of surprise.

'Why, surely, it is Irene's pearl necklace!'

'Exactly. I should have known it anywhere. The necklace I chose with such care, and her father gave her upon her last birthday. And where do you suppose I found it to-day?'

Athol shook her head in blank astonishment. Mrs. Bridget approached nearer and took the case in her hands.

'Sure it is the same,' she said; 'and a prettier trinket of the kind I never saw before. Where did you find it, sister?'

'I saw it in Griffith's window,' answered madam. Griffith was a watch-maker and jeweller in Hownston; a man of upright character, and largely patronised by the gentry round.

'In Griffith's window?' echoed Athol, and then stopped suddenly short, with a feeling of great dismay. Had not somebody told her that Griffith was friendly and well-disposed towards the Methodists? And had he not given a handsome donation towards the expenses of the chapel now in course of erection? Athol could scarcely have told why these thoughts instantly arose in her mind in connection with the appearance of Irene's necklace in that window; but she ceased speaking, and only listened with breathless interest to the talk of the elder ladies.

'How could it have got there?' asked Mrs. Bridget.

'Exactly my own question,' said madam, 'and I went in to inquire. I did not of course say what I knew of the former history of the necklace, but I made searching inquiries as to how it had reached Griffith's hands. I

thought the man was a little inclined to be reserved, but when pressed he spoke out frankly enough. He had nothing to be ashamed of. It was not long before I had the whole story. I should like you to guess who had brought the necklace for sale, and the object for which it was to be sold.'

Athol's face was crimson; the name of Nancy Dawson was on her lips, but she restrained herself, whilst Mrs. Bridget only shook her head, saying she could form no conjecture at all.

'It was Tom Heron that brought that necklace to sell!' cried madam, with something of triumph in her tone. 'He brought it to Griffith's with a lying, trumped-up tale of how it had been given to him by the owner for the good of the cause—the Methodist cause, if you please; and he was persuaded to buy it, and to place the money in the hands of those persons who were collecting funds for that miserable building they are erecting under the name of a chapel.'

'But how could Tom get hold of the necklace?' asked Mrs. Bridget quickly. 'I cannot understand.'

'I can,' answered madam incisively. 'It is not difficult to see how it was done. During the early months of the year, shortly after our return from Bath, that young man was constantly about the house. We had sickness in the stables, and the boys encouraged him to come about the place as he chose. When a perfectly unscrupulous man has the run of the back regions, one never knows what the end will be. He had chances and to spare of entering the house himself, or of corrupting one of the indoor maids——'

'But I thought that at that time he had turned over a new leaf?'

'Turned into a canting Methodist, you mean!' sneered madam with unwonted heat of manner. 'Ay, so he had—there lies just the point of the whole thing. The old, wild, wicked Tom Heron would never have demeaned himself by theft and dissimulation. He might be reckless, profane,

a number of undesirable things, but low, and mean, and dishonest—never! It was for these deeply pious Methodists to teach him those lessons of guile. Have I not always said that they were Jesuits in disguise? And does not this thing prove the truth of my words? Had I known what I know of him now, I never would have had him near the place. But it was hidden from me, though other people knew it, it seems. And this is what comes of it. The Methodists have made Tom Heron a liar and a thief!’

‘It is very strange,’ said Mrs. Bridget. ‘Are you sure that the thing has not happened since the poor young man returned to his wild ways, as he has done now, they say?’

‘Ay, and is ten times worse than ever; it is always the way with those who think they have got hold of some wonderful new religion that is going to make them better than anybody else. Oh no, Bridget, there is no mistake. This necklace has been in Griffith’s hands for several months. It came to him when Tom Heron was in the full flood of his Methodist enthusiasm. Well, he will soon learn by sharp experience what his new friends have done for him.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Athol, who was looking rather pale.

‘Mean, child?’ echoed her aunt sharply. ‘Why, I mean, of course, that he will be arrested for it. Bare-faced robbery must not go unpunished. It may be a hanging matter, for aught I know. Not long since I know that men were hanged for sheep-stealing, and highwaymen are hanged for robbery still—and a very good thing, too. A fine end to Tom’s Methodism—that it should lead him to the gallows! Well, if it prove an example and a warning to others, it will not be thrown away. It seems to me that people in these days require a very sharp lesson; silly sheep, all running one after another after false shepherds. I have no patience with it.’

Athol turned away to the window, that her face might not be seen. A horrible misgiving had come over her. She

did not believe that the necklace had been stolen. She remembered asking Irene to lend it to her only a few weeks back, and her cousin professed not to be able to find it. Athol had been struck by her manner at the time, and had thought it strange, but had since forgotten the incident. Now it all came back to her. Irene was certainly a party to the disappearance of the trinket. But what would her course of action be now? It was impossible to believe that she would permit Tom Heron to be thrown into prison on the charge of theft; but so involved had the girl now become in the meshes of a net of deceit, that to break through would be extraordinarily difficult, and Athol felt as though she could not rely in the least upon what Irene was likely to say or do upon a difficult occasion. She had so often surprised her before, that she had no clue to the state of her feelings now.

Miss Fortescue was trying to soothe down madam's displeasure. Good Mrs. Bridget, though by no means an advocate of the Methodists, had learned by this time that they were not an evilly disposed or turbulent community, if let alone by others. She thought it very odd if Tom Heron's moral perceptions had been blunted by association with them, and by listening to their teachings. Still, as the proverb has it, 'Facts are stubborn things,' and the facts appeared to be against him. Still, there might be some explanation, and she was trying to get madam to avoid acting with precipitation. She, too, was dimly aware of Irene's secret sympathy with the Methodists, though she did not know how far it had gone.

The rector came in and heard the story; he was a little disposed to pooh-pooh the whole thing, and to say that there must be two necklaces of the same pattern in the world.

'Go home and talk to Irene about it,' he said; 'I don't doubt for a moment but that she can lay your suspicions at rest. Tom Heron is not that kind of sinner; and not even the wildest of Jesuits could persuade him to theft—let alone

these Methodists, who, with all their cranks and crazes, are honest and well-meaning fellows in the main. Oh, I know what you feel about them, sister; but you see I claim a little more knowledge, having so many of them in my parish, and under my nose, as it were. I often enough wish them all at Jericho; but that does not make them rogues or thieves. And if they do drive some poor creatures almost into lunacy with terror and remorse, they do turn some of the wicked from their evil ways. I am the last to deny it, though it means that I admit them to have succeeded where I have failed. Go home and talk to Irene. I daresay you will find that she has her necklace all safe at home.'

Madam did not believe herself mistaken; but time was getting on, and she took her brother-in-law's hint.

Athol spent an uncomfortable evening, wondering what was going on at Rookwood, and speculating if she herself were acting rightly in keeping her cousin's secret under such serious circumstances; and as the following morning dawned fair and bright, she ordered her horse to be saddled very shortly after breakfast, and rode off to see Mary Ernscliff, to share with her in some measure the burden that was oppressing her. Mary Ernscliff, as Athol well knew, was as conscious of the change which had recently come over Irene as she was herself. The two friends had discussed it together frequently, and Athol was sure that Mary partially divined the cause. Both regretted that constitutional timidity, coupled with a not unreasonable dread of her mother's displeasure, still held the girl silent, and led her into a tacit and negative form of deceitfulness; but both hoped that something would arise to show her the error into which she was falling, and make her see that, with whatever motive, she was actually doing evil that good might come.

There was another reason why Athol wished to see Mary. The lady of Ernscliff had recently succeeded to a handsome fortune and a small estate just over the Scotch border, which

had come to her by the death of an uncle. Athol had only heard this news a few days ago, and was wishful to congratulate Mary on her good fortune. She knew that this access of wealth would be certain to add zest to her brother's wooing, and the sister was naturally anxious to see if any gradual change had come over Mary's mind with regard to her future. It seemed impossible to Athol that she could seriously contemplate living her life always alone because of the tragedy of her early girlhood. Surely the image of her dead lover must be growing dim by this time; and when once that image had faded, what more could heart of maiden desire than the dashing, handsome, lover-like George Fortescue?

Still, it was the matter of Irene and the necklace which was uppermost in Athol's mind as she dismounted at the door, and made her way into Mary's presence. In a few moments the facts of the case were all made known, and Athol was eagerly asking Mary what she thought about the whole business.

'I do not think Tom Heron would steal,' was the decisive answer; 'if that necklace is Irene's, he must have come by it in some honest way. He has been rash and wrong in having anything to do with it, but rashness has always been poor Tom's failing. I am very grieved for him just now. My little friend Molly, his blind sister, is in sad distress. It seems such a noble nature depraved and thrown away. I feared when I heard how he shut himself up and refused any kind of help or companionship, good or bad, that the strain would be too much—that there would be a terrible relapse. Poor lad, he has so much against him; and even the truth, when he gets a grip of it, only sets him at variance with all the world. He seems fated to be an Ishmaelite; seems almost to desire it for himself. But I truly believe he will come out of this again, and will perhaps be a better and humbler man for the fall. He had, without knowing it, perhaps, such unbounded confidence in himself—in his own

strength. This sad fall will no doubt teach him that he must look upon himself as a little child, to be led and guided still, and very apt to slip and fall and falter.'

'If he is sent to prison and the gallows, he will have small time to learn anything,' answered Athol quickly. 'I don't profess to know much about souls; I think of people's bodies, and it seems to me that Tom Heron's is in no small peril just now.'

What Mary's reply would have been Athol never knew, for at this moment the door was suddenly opened, and Irene burst into the room, her face pale and tear-stained, her eyes red as if with sleeplessness and anxious terror. Seeing who was with Mary, she divined that the story was half told, and flinging herself down on her knees, she buried her face in Mary's dress as she broke out into passionate speech.

'Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do? It is too terrible, too horrible to be believed! What shall I do? What shall I do?'

'There is always one thing to do in times of perplexity, Irene—one thing that can never be wrong,' answered Mary quietly, 'and that is to tell the whole truth, whatever it may be. It may be hard, it may seem to be almost impossible; but God is always ready to help us to be brave in His service, and we know that He is the Truth.'

'Oh, Mary, Mary, Mary! how can I tell my mother? Oh, if only I had spoken at first, it might have been easy; but now that it has gone on for a year! Oh, I do not know what to do!'

Mary did not affect to misunderstand her, though this was the first time Irene had spoken so openly of her secret.

'You mean about your sympathy with the Methodist revival, as it is called? Come, Irene, try to be calm, and let us look the matter quietly in the face. But first about this necklace—how did it come into Tom's possession?'

'I gave it him!' cried Irene; 'I gave it him to sell for the

chapel. Nancy said it was right, and I thought it was too. We were both afraid to sell it ourselves, but we thought if Tom did it, it would be quite safe, and he was not afraid.

'But your mother might have asked at any time what had become of it. What would you have said then?'

Irene's face was still hidden, but she was speaking freely now, and without subterfuge.

'I do not exactly know—we hoped it might seem as if it were lost. We had tided over difficulties before, and hoped to again. Oh, Mary! I know it sounds very deceitful, but it did seem as though to save our souls, and be soldiers of Christ, it was worth everything it cost.'

Mary could not restrain a smile at these words.

'And did you think, little one, that salvation was only to be found in Methodism, and that Christ's soldiers had to begin their campaign by disobeying some of His most solemn commandments? Irene dear, you might have saved yourself much misery and perplexity if you had taken better counsel than that of a well-meaning but ignorant girl like Nancy Dawson——'

'Oh, indeed I might! I am dreadfully disappointed in Nancy,' answered Irene, with a fresh access of sorrow. 'It was only last week that she suddenly gave notice, and declared she would stay no longer in a house so wicked as ours. It is true she had been asked to do some work on Sunday which it was not quite her place to do; but I found out very soon that her real reason in leaving was, that she had had the offer of a place in a rich family in Hownston, where the people are all more or less Methodists. The housekeeper was angry with her, and said she might go at once, and she packed up and went off the next day. She did not seem to have the least feeling for me—left alone, without a soul to speak to about—about the things we care for. She said it was her duty to go and live in a godly household when she had the chance; and I daresay it was, but I did think she might have shown a little feeling for me,

after leading me and teaching me, and warning me never to let mother know anything.'

'Do you mean that Nancy deliberately tried to turn you into a Methodist when she entered your service as a maid?' asked Athol.

'Yes, indeed she did,' answered Irene; 'and she soon made me see that only the Methodists knew the way of salvation. Before I had been so happy sometimes in listening to Mr. Latham. When he came instead of those curates who went before, and was so different from them, I began to think I was learning the truth, and life looked different, and I was happy. And then—oh, I hardly know how it began!—but I found out the real way—and then we went to Bath, and Nancy took me to the early morning meetings, and I was convinced of sin, and by-and-by found peace. Oh, it was such a happy, blessed time! And I thought I should be happy always; but somehow, now that I am here, all seems different. I cannot get to the preachings, and church has been spoiled for me—it is all so cold, so hard, so formal.'

'If it is that, Irene, the fault is in yourself,' answered Mary, smiling. 'If you do not believe me, ask Mr. Wesley himself. He is a true son of the Established as well as of the Universal Church. My dear, dear child, you have been making a sad mistake all this time in thinking that the repentance for sin and the ardent faith in the Crucified Saviour are only to be found amongst Methodists. When you get home, get your Prayer Book, and see what that teaches you. Compare its teaching with that in your Bible. Is not John Wesley himself a clergyman, and does he not love the Church of his land? Have you not been like those of old who said, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos"? Is Christ divided now more than He was then? Does He wish to be found in one small part of this great world, and excluded from all the rest? Think, Irene, what it means when you speak as if souls could be saved by Methodists

alone? Is it not denying that Christ died for all? Is it not, if pushed to its logical conclusion, almost as much as saying that *men* hold the key of heaven or hell? Is it not claiming for them what they never dream of claiming for themselves, and would not such teaching lead at last to something worse than Romish superstition and error?’

Irene gazed at Mary with dilated eyes. The poor child had gone through a great deal during the past eighteen months of her life; the false position in which she had placed herself with regard to her mother had sealed her lips and caused her to prey upon herself in secret; whilst she had no counsellor but an ignorant girl, who had shown herself anything but a wise guide. No wonder that her mind had become strangely perverted, and her ideas were all thrown into confusion. Tossed about in a sea of doubt and uncertainty, she clung to Mary as if in her she found a sheet-anchor.

‘Then it would not be wicked to cease being a Methodist, and to let myself be happy in church and enjoy the service again?’

‘Do we worship another God in the church here?’ asked Mary, smiling, ‘or have you learnt to worship a new one with your Methodist friends?’

Irene hung her head, and murmured that it seemed different.

‘Just so, dear child; the differences are in externals, not in the deep underlying truth. In many places—formerly in Sax itself—the clergy were sleeping, and the Church seemed to slumber with them; it needed that a call should be made to startle and awake them, and God has caused His Name to be proclaimed aloud by unlettered men whom the world despises. But leaving the wider question, let us think only of your position. You are in your parents’ house, under their care, and they would not wish you to openly join yourself to a body whose action is not approved by your mother. Here in Sax we are blessed by a good and holy

pastor, who does not withhold the Word from his flock ; therefore there can be no call upon you to go elsewhere for the Bread of Life. Irene, you must tell your mother your story—the mystery about the necklace renders any more concealment absolutely impossible ; but, in telling her, you can tell her also that you repent your false step, and that you will no longer act in opposition to her wishes. It may be hard to do, but it is the right course to take ; and there is always compensation in that thought, although there may be suffering and punishment to be borne. Come, tell me that you will be brave and do it ; think what the relief will be when all is known. Let me hear you say that you will confess all.'

'Oh, I will, I will !' cried Irene, with sudden passionate fervour. 'But, Mary, dear Mary, will you come with me whilst I do it ?'

'I will do so gladly,' answered Mary, rising with alacrity. 'Let us lose no time in setting forth.'

And Athol sprang up and threw her arm around Irene, crying,—

'We will all go together ; we will all help you through with it.'

CHAPTER XVII.

MARY ERNSCLIFF ASSERTS HERSELF.

THE thing was done, and Irene Fortescue, looking wan, and shaken, and exhausted, was once more beneath the roof of Ernscliff, a guest of the friend who had stood by her during the stormy interview with her mother, and who had easily succeeded at its close in carrying off the agitated girl to her own house, on a visit that was likely to be one of considerable duration.

It was indeed well for Irene that she had had two such supporters as Athol and Mary to stand beside her whilst she made her confession to her mother, for madam's wrath amounted to positive fury; even the squire, when informed of the matter by his angry wife in the most uncompromising terms, had showed himself more displeased and choleric than Irene had ever before known him. It had taken all Athol's coaxing blandishments, and all Mary's gentle soothing, to get any semblance of peace restored; and when the latter asked leave to carry Irene back with her to spend the Christmas at Ernscliff, madam had answered icily that she was perfectly welcome to do so if she chose, as she had no wish to set eyes upon her untruthful, undutiful, and deceitful daughter for some time to come. Since she had chosen to act in this rebellious and disgraceful way, she had better for the future judge for herself. There would be no pleasure in seeing her at her father's board at the approaching festive season; and Irene had been glad and thankful to escape from these scathing words, and to find herself safely at Ernscliff with Mary.

Athol had remained with her aunt. The rector and his family always came over to spend Christmas at Rookwood, and Hugh, who had recently been ordained, was about to come home and establish himself there for a time. It seemed a strange thing for Irene to be absent from her home at such a season; but Athol was secretly rather pleased at the arrangement, for her brother George would very soon form one of the party at Rookwood, and Irene's presence at Ernscliff would form an excellent excuse for a good deal of communication between the two houses.

But just now Irene was sunk in the depths of woe, and the bitterest drop in her cup was that she had brought a reproach upon her Christian profession, and had given her mother a reasonable handle against the Methodists, which she knew would be used without stint. Irene saw plainly enough now that she had been wrong; and she knew that if she had been more open with those to whom she had learned to look up to as guides and pastors, some at least amongst them would have showed to her her error. It may not be denied that with all their earnest desire to do good, and their self-denying zealous lives, many amongst these early Methodists allowed their zeal to outrun their discretion; and that without intentionally countenancing deceit or crooked ways, they did so impress upon their followers the maxim that a man should lose the whole world gladly to save his soul, that the young and inexperienced amongst them were tempted to set up their wills in opposition to that of their parents or lawful guardians; and when placed in a difficult and dependent position, were oftentimes led into a course of concealment which culminated, as in Irene's case, in actual falsehood and deceit. There can be no doubt that there was some truth in, and some reason for, the animadversions against the Methodists made by their opponents, greatly exaggerated as these were. But that families were divided against themselves—parents against children, masters against servants, house against house—cannot be denied.

Men were told by some of the more extreme teachers that it was against the Divine law to make provision for their families; that everything was the Lord's, and all should be given to the poor. Innumerable persons were driven to the verge of madness by excitement or remorse, engendered by the fiery style of preaching in vogue, and some were permanently unhinged in mind and unfitted for any walk in life. Riots were stirred up, damage to life and property was inflicted; and though it would not be fair to charge this upon the Methodists themselves, still it gave a reasonable ground of complaint against them, and caused their appearance in any new district to be anticipated with dread by the authorities.

Madam's wrath had been hot enough before, when she had had no especial and personal grievance; now it passed all bounds. She was too angry even to mention her daughter's name, when Irene had once quitted the house; and since it seemed as if some victim must be found upon which her anger should expend itself, she promptly declared it her intention still to prosecute Tom Heron for having been concerned in the sale of stolen goods; the more so that she was perfectly certain that he would have been found to have retained a part of the price of the necklace for himself, in which case she still declared she would have him brought to the gallows.

The squire, however, here interposed. He would have nothing to do with the matter, nor suffer open steps to be taken. The necklace had been his daughter's own property, and she had given it to Tom to sell. It was not his business to question her right to dispose of her own jewels; the whole responsibility of the transaction rested with Irene, as whose servant he had acted. Baulked of this hope, madam's wrath rather increased than abated, though she had to content herself with vague threats which boded little good to Tom, if ever he should place himself within the reach of her power.

At present all that was known of the young man was, that he was indulging in a wild outbreak of drunken dissipation. He appeared to be living for the most part at the Red Dragon, which was now his mother's home, though he and his comrades were heard of here, there, and all through the neighbourhood, committing mischievous depredations, leading savage sports, and making themselves notorious in the old ways which had been common enough in Tom's unregenerate days. His old cottage still stood empty, shut up and dreary. People wondered sometimes, since he had given up his Methodism, whether he would be allowed to remain there. Madam, however, answered this question with great decision, and with a shrug and a sneer.

'Have back any man who has once turned Methodist ! I know better. I know how it will be with him. He will grow weary of debauchery and drunkenness, and then he will go to his Methodist-Jesuits and get absolution, and play the saint again for a few weeks or months, set the whole village by the ears, as he did before, and then break out again and drag all his new and old comrades with him. Did I not always say these men were Papists in disguise ? and have I not proved myself in the right ? They teach children to lie and deceive their parents ; they drive men to madness with their so-called asceticism, and then, when the reaction has taken place, they go through the same formula of conviction and conversion—whatever they call it—and are white-washed and set up again on their pedestals. It will be the same with Tom Heron, as you will see ; once a Methodist, and there is no trust to be reposed in him any more. He shall never be a tenant of ours, I will take good care of that.'

No one in the house attempted to argue with madam. Fulk and George sympathised heartily with her. The squire and his brother and sister had too little sympathy with the 'new-fangled' doctrines to stand up in defence of their advocates, even whilst they knew that such wholesale con-

demnation was unjust. They felt that she had cause just now to be rather bitter, and to argue with madam was at no time a pleasant thing.

Hugh alone ever ventured to lift up his voice in protest, and then he managed to do it in so moderate and respectful a fashion that his mother was seldom angry. Hugh was sufficiently a stranger at Rookwood just now to command a certain amount of attention and respect. His college career had been distinguished and blameless. His father openly hoped to see him a dean, or even a bishop, if he lived long enough. Hugh did not appear to have any such ambition for himself; for the present he declared it to be his wish to remain at home, and assist Mr. Latham in the care of the parish. The failing health of the latter was causing some anxiety in the minds of those who knew and loved him, and they were all glad that he would have some assistance during the inclement months of the winter and early spring.

Christmas had come and gone, and the new year had commenced, when a piece of news reached madam's ears which roused her to deep displeasure. It had been rumoured for some days past that Tom Heron had been seen at the forge again; a sign that he had come to his right mind, and had for a time ceased his wild and intemperate ways; but madam had firmly declared her intention of rendering his further residence in the village impossible. He should not have his old cottage any more; he should not even be permitted to live either with his uncle or his mother—at least not upon the estate. For any person who was bold enough to give him permanent shelter would promptly receive notice to quit. And it was scarcely likely that either Samson Heron or Nat Crowder would dream for a moment of relinquishing a profitable and long-established business for the sake of a ne'er-do-well like Tom.

Madam thus believed her object of ridding Sax of Tom Heron's presence to have been practically fulfilled, when she

was electrified by the news that Mary Ernscliff had actually sought him out, and offered him the use of a comfortable little cottage on her estate, only half a mile away from the forge, and that he and his blind sister were already established there, and were ranked as objects of unwonted interest to both the ladies of Ernscliff.

In hot haste madam ordered her carriage and drove rapidly to Ernscliff. Although the young people from Rookwood had been going and coming constantly to that house, madam herself had not entered the doors since Irene had been carried there as Mary's guest. Madam did not wish to quarrel with Mary, who since her access of fortune was of more than her former importance in the eyes of the Fortescue family. She hoped most sincerely that her nephew would succeed in winning the affections of the lady, for George might be trusted to put down all eccentricities of this kind with a high hand; but there were certain things which madam felt it due to herself to insist upon, and it was very plain that if she had given forth the command that Tom Heron was to be an outcast from Sax, Mary must not be allowed to give him an asylum of refuge at Ernscliff. If the matter were clearly put before her, she would surely see it for herself.

Mary and her grandmother received their guest very courteously. Irene did not appear; but that her mother did not regret. She had come full of the one object in hand, and was scarcely seated before she commenced her harangue, pointing out in incisive terms the enormity of Tom's past offences and his highly reprehensible conduct, telling Mary that both she and her husband had agreed that his presence in the village was doing so much harm that they had agreed to eject him from it without further ceremony.

'Yes, I heard that,' answered Mary quietly; 'that is how it was I offered him one of my cottages here. Poor fellow, he was very grateful. I trust he will do better in the future; but with that ardent, impulsive nature of his it will be an

uphill struggle, and he will need all the help we can give him.'

Madam drew herself up very stiff and straight.

'My dear Mary,' she said in accents which would have turned Irene hot and cold with embarrassment and shame, 'you surely do not mean to tell me that you—you yourself—have held any personal intercourse with that depraved and wicked youth? I could not have believed it of you. It is terrible to think of.'

'Why so, madam?' asked Mary, with a steady brightness in her eyes. 'It is not many weeks ago since you had him to your own house and in your own presence. Before he had been for a year of his life a Methodist he was considered a very fine young man, even with all his sins and follies; and although I fully admit that this last outbreak of his has been worse than many others, it has not differed in kind, but only in degree, from what went before. With all his many wickednesses and weaknesses, there is something fine about Tom Heron; and if I can be in any way the means of helping him through a crisis in his life—a crisis which these next months will most probably bring—and if any act of mine shall help to turn the balance of the scale upon the right side, I shall think no pains or trouble thrown away. He is bowed down now to the very dust with self-reproach and humiliation. It is pitiful to see him and to hear him speak. His little blind sister is the best comforter he has; but all of us who can help him ought to try and do so.'

Stiffer and more rigid grew madam's erect figure.

'Pardon me, my dear,' she said at length, 'but you are making a very great mistake, and it is my duty to warn you of it. Do you know that in attempting to reclaim this utterly irreclaimable young man you are deliberately opposing your opinions and your authority to mine; trying to put me in the wrong, and setting the whole place talking and wondering? That is a course of action against which really I must protest in strong terms.'

Mary was standing with one hand upon the carved chimney-piece. Her face was slightly flushed, but otherwise she gave no sign of emotion.

'I am sorry to have to disagree with you, madam,' she said, 'but it is not I who put you in the wrong. I must remind you that I have the same authority at Ernscliff as you at Sax. My cottages are my own; I may let them to whom I please. I have a wise and kind counsellor in my grandmother, who will not be led away by the inexperience of youth, and she has been one with me in my decision on this point. To us it appears a very terrible thing to take a course which seems like pushing the soul of a fellow-man down into the gulf of sin and despair, when a strong and kindly hand might help to draw it out. I dare not but hold out that hand. If I offend you, I regret it, but it does not shake my purpose.'

'And I think that Mary is right in following the dictates of her heart,' said Mrs. Ernscliff gently. 'I am an old woman now, and have a long record to look back upon; a far longer record than even yours, my dear friend. There are many, many acts of cold and even-handed justice which I now look back to with regret, though at the time my judgment approved them; but not one single act of mercy or charity that I would wish undone. As we near the gates of the eternal city, methinks we learn to think more gently of the faults and failings of our struggling brothers and sisters; or, perchance, it is that we begin to catch that first faint echo of the song of joy and praise which the holy angels of God uplift over every sinner that repenteth.'

Mary threw a quick look of gratitude at her grandmother; but madam's face was utterly irresponsive. Good breeding alone restrained her from an outbreak of really violent anger.

'I do not understand sentimental sophisms,' she said; 'I deal with plain facts. Tom Heron has disgraced himself again and again. He is a most dangerous man, and his

influence in Sax is doing untold harm. I have taken means to rid the place of so pestilent a fellow, and I am naturally exceedingly annoyed to find that you have given him a footing here. I call it very wrong in itself, and very disrespectful personally to me; but I have no authority to prevent it.'

'I am sorry you disapprove, and make of it a personal question,' answered Mrs. Ernscliff, 'but our duty seems too plain to be disregarded. We have asked counsel of the Church in the person of Mr. Latham, and he thinks as we do about it.'

'Oh, I have no patience with Mr. Latham!' cried madam hotly, as if glad to have another object on which to vent her spleen. 'But he will be richly rewarded one of these days for his time-serving folly, and so will you also. If this young man does repent of his evil courses, he will have another violent fit of Methodist fury come over him. The next thing will be that he will turn preacher himself, and set all the place by the ears. Why, there is no knowing but that he may send for one of his own sect, as it is, to pray over him, or some such nonsense, and work him up into some ecstatic state of pious fury, which they call religion. A nice thing that will be for you of quiet Ernscliff!'

'We think it quite probable that we may ourselves ask one of his own Methodist teachers to come and see him,' answered Mary Ernscliff very quietly; 'he is in a very peculiar state, and does not respond to Mr. Latham's overtures in the least. We will wait for a time, to see if he can be got at by kindness and gentle handling from us; but if not, Mr. Latham thinks of writing to Mr. Wesley himself. He is often in Yorkshire, travelling here and there, and if there were good cause, he would doubtless turn aside for a day to see what could be done for Tom Heron.'

Madam sat simply transfixed with horror.

'Mary Ernscliff,' she said at length, 'I think you must be mad!'

‘I hope not,’ answered Mary, smiling; ‘but I am interested in Tom, and if, as it now seems, he is only really open to the teaching he can hear from his Methodist friends, why should we not make his way plain to have of that the best and purest that exists? All we hear of Mr. Wesley himself shows how wise, how full of tact, how earnest in his Master’s cause he is. Far better would it be for Tom to have speech with him, than to go to some——’

‘Mary, Mary! I have no patience with you! You speak like a child and an imbecile!’ cried madam, almost losing her self-control. ‘What! you mean to tell me you will actually invite that arch-schismatic Wesley into this very place, to sow seeds of dissension and sectarian strife in your own village? You will teach your people to believe that souls can only be saved by one little sect——’

‘Pardon me,’ interrupted Mary, as madam paused with her sentence half finished, as though she scarce knew what words were strong enough in which to express her reprobation, ‘it is no sectarian work in which Mr. Wesley is engaged; his call is to the whole of the Christian world—the call as of John the Baptist, to repentance and faith. May it not be that he is but the forerunner of some mighty change, some mighty awakening of God’s power in His Church? May it not even be that our Lord Himself may be at hand, to gather His first-fruits to Himself? Oh, madam, pardon me if I speak too freely, but it hurts me to hear any minister of God spoken of with scorn, be his mission ever so small, be his errors even many and great. But one thing I will say,—it is you, and such as you, that may drive these Methodists into sectarianism. As Mr. Wesley teaches and preaches, all men are bidden to love and revere their Church, the Established Church of the land. I have heard it said of him that he does not even allow himself to be called a dissenter. He loves the Church, he bids his followers love it too; and so they do for the most part, save in places where the clergy themselves force them to distrust and fear

their own pastors, and rank them as enemies. Tom Heron has some of this feeling. But whose is the fault? Who led him on to overthrow the preacher at Hownston? Who taught him to cast opprobrious epithets at him? Was it not the rector's own son? Is any one in that place more bitter than George?'

But madam had heard enough; she rose in visible wrath. Was she to stay to hear Mary animadvert upon the very man who was using all his persuasive arts to try and win her for his wife?

'That will do, Mary; some day, perhaps, you will see the folly of your ways. I have done. I see you are as stubborn as all these persons become, when once they get Methodist frenzies into their heads. I only hope you may not live to repent bitterly the error of your headstrong ways.'

It was a relief to see the last of madam's sweeping garments; but Mary had not altogether done with antagonism, though in another form. George, whose visits to Ernscliff were unwelcomely frequent, was greatly amused at hearing of Mary's new *protégé*, and vowed he would have a hand himself in the conversion of Tom, and turn him out a better fellow than all the Methodists put together.

Mary was far more afraid of George's influence upon him than of any severity he might have to encounter from madam, had it been possible to suppose her demeaning herself by addressing him. She spoke seriously to George, begging him to let the young man alone, and not try to unsettle Tom's mind even by encouragement that might be kindly meant. George was ready enough to promise anything to Mary when she spoke so earnestly. Taking her hand in his, he raised it to his lips, and vowed that she should be his queen and mistress, and that he would be in all things her most faithful and submissive slave. Such figures of speech and acts of homage were more customary then than now, and Mary could not well raise any protest, but she quietly withdrew her hand, and changed the subject,

though George's eyes were fixed upon her face with all the ardour of a lover.

'I would do anything in the world to please you, Mary,' he said; 'you must know that you are more to me than——'

'Hush, George!' she said decisively. 'I have told you before that I like not such words.'

'Yes, yes, I know; but time changes us all. I am sure it has changed you in some ways, Mary. You cannot always keep me silent.'

A quick flush rose suddenly in Mary's face, and as suddenly died down. She rose quietly, and passed into the adjoining apartments, where Mrs. Ernscliff was sitting. George did not attempt to follow, but looked eagerly after her.

'I verily believe that she is changing,' he said to himself. 'She has ceased to regard herself as a widow. I shall win her and her fortune yet.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TROUBLESOME CHARGE.

‘**A** FINE sight o’ trouble he be giving up there,’ snorted old Glegg in fine contempt, as he sat with his pipe and his glass in the parlour of the Red Dragon. ‘That cooms of folks a-setting of theirselves up agin madam. I always did say, and I sticks to it through everything, madam knows what’s what. She’s got a powerful lot o’ grit in her, has madam, ’specially considering as she’s a woman. But folks *will* go their own way, and a fine mess they get into with it. I reckon Mrs. Mary wishes rarely as she hadn’t took that there Tom into her cottage. What with doctors’ bills, and what with one thing and another, there’ll be a fine sight to pay ; and it’s no thanks as she’ll get from that graceless loon. He’ll be off to his old ways so soon as he can set one foot before another.’

‘Is he getting any better ?’ asked Trusbet.

‘So they say ; but with them rheumatics no one knows how things will turn. Times they flys to the heart, and make an end of a man all in a twinkling, like the snuff of a candle. He’d be a fine corpse, would Tom Heron,’ added the sexton, the professional side of his nature getting the upper hand. ‘I shouldn’t wonder now but what he’d measure six foot four or five in his coffin. They lengthen out a bit dead, you see ; anyway he’d take a big coffin to hold un. I never thought to dig Tom Heron’s grave ; but there, there, in the midst o’ life we are in death. True enough—true enough. And parson hisself looks as if he’d be the next to

go. He'd never ha' got through the winter if he hadn't had Mr. Hugh to help un.'

'Be it Mr. Hugh as has set all them new-fangled notions goin'?' asked another of the group. Glegg was a great authority on all matters ecclesiastical, and some recent innovations on old ways had aroused considerable interest and excitement in the village. Madam had raised no open protest, and so long as the great house remained acquiescent, the village was diffident about criticising; but there was a strong feeling that explanation was required, and Glegg was the man who was supposed to be the oracle, if he could but be persuaded to open his lips.

He screwed up his face now into an expression which implied a vast reserve of knowledge, and being pressed by his friends to deliver himself of an opinion, he at last condescended to speak.

'It be Mr. Hugh in part, and Mr. Latham in part,' he answered with praiseworthy caution. 'If you'd a took in half the meaning of parson's sermons ever since he's been here, you'd a known as he was aiming at some'ut. Bless you, I knew it all along. I've said times and again to myself, We'll have changes here some o' these fine days if madam will allow it; but I suppose as he was afeared to tackle madam, and so he bided quiet till his chance came.'

'He didn't bide quiet altogether; he put on Sacrament Sunday once a month, and it used only to be three times a year.'

'Why, yes, he did that,' assented Glegg; 'and they do say as madam did not like it over much; not that she minded Sacrament Sunday coming oftener, but she thought as it were impertinent of the curate to want to make changes where she were satisfied herself. But rector, he said it were the right thing, and he had it in his church, and so we had it too. But Mr. Hugh comes and says as that isn't enough, and every Sunday should be Sacrament Sunday. Them young men from Oxford, they do get hold of a powerful lot o' queer

notions. I'd like to know who'd stay every Sunday. Why, 'tishn't but half a dozen besides the gentry as stop once a month. Folks wants to get home to their dinners, and like enough they should. Mr. Hugh, so they say at the Hall, says as he'd have fewer sermons and Sacrament always ; but, lor' bless you ! the farmers wouldn't never put up with that. Why, when would they get their Sunday nap, if sermon was took off ? It won't do ; it won't do. And I'll tell Mr. Hugh my own self, if so be as he asks me ; and who would be like to know better ?'

'Folks say as the ladies of Ernscliff are powerful fond o' new-fangled notions,' remarked one of the company tentatively. 'I've heerd tell as they got a Methody to Tom when he was so wild-like, but that he couldn't understand a word that was spoke, and was off his head days and nights together. It do seem strange as they should a took up with un, just as madam turned un off the estate. It ain't many folks as cares to fly in madam's face ; but they don't seem onfriendly-like when they do meet.'

Glegg closed one eye in a meaning fashion, and laid his finger against the side of his rubicund nose.

'Madam doesn't wish to quarrel with Mrs. Mary, for all she's a bit wrong-headed and wilful-like. Why, it's plain as anything what the captain goes there so often for ; and they do say as she has a tidy bit of money now—much more than Ernscliff brings her in. I don't see what more a woman wants than a husband like the captain, and he'd soon cure her of her queer notions. But folks talk and talk, and things don't seem to get on much from what they was a year and more ago. It do seem now as if it was Mr. Hugh who cared the most for her. He be always up there talkin' and talkin' with her, and looking after that there Tom, and as much took up with Ernscliff as ever he is with Sax. Ay, ay ! I knows the ways of un. Mr. Hugh knows where the money lies as well as the captain and madam. They don't mean that there fortune to go out of the family, that I'll take my

Bible oath on. If it bean't one it'll be t'other ; you see if it isn't so.'

There was a good deal of nodding of heads, and wise looks were exchanged all round. Glegg was the oracle, but all declared that similar thoughts had suggested themselves to each mind individually before, and the assembly broke up in high good-humour, some wishing good luck to the dashing young captain, whilst others hoped it would be Mr. Hugh, who was always so civil-spoken, and seemed to care to hear the story of the poor man's joys or woes—a less usual thing in those days than it has since become.

As may be gathered from the foregoing bits of village gossip, many things had happened in Sax since Christmas ; and the months of the winter and early spring had been a sad time for poor Tom Heron. Weakened by long abstinence and the asceticism he had practised when striving after a better manner of life, he had been still farther unhinged by the wild excesses of those miserable weeks, when he had broken through all bonds and had relapsed into his old vicious ways. The result of all this was that a violent chill, taken at the forge one cold winter's day, prostrated him with inflammatory rheumatism, and for many weeks his life had been almost despaired of. Had he been inhabiting his old damp and unsanitary house, he would scarcely have risen from his sick-bed again ; but as kind Providence would have it, he now found himself in one of the Ernscliff cottages, where the well-being and comfort of the inhabitants was studied ; and moreover the ladies of Ernscliff not only called in adequate medical help, but sent from their own table and kitchen everything needful for the sufferer during his long illness and still longer convalescence. And so with all this help Tom was slowly and painfully struggling back to life again ; and as he lay looking out through the open lattice window upon the awakening world of Nature, he felt a slight stirring of the pulses, and the first faint desire for life that he had known for many a long week.

Janet Dawson sat beside him, stitching with her characteristic industry at some piece of household linen. Strange as it was to see that stern face beside him, Tom had grown used to the sight by this time. The fact was, that Janet Dawson was out-and-out the best nurse in the whole countryside, and had been induced, partly for love and (it must also be confessed) partly for money, to undertake the care of Tom Heron during his long and dangerous illness. Mary Ernscliff had a wonderful faculty for getting her wishes carried out, and it had been her most earnest wish that Tom should have every chance in this severe sickness. Janet had been loth to leave home, but winter was not the busy season at the farm, the remuneration promised was an inducement, and in the end she had grown interested in the 'case,' and proud of her skill when the doctors one and all (for more than one had been called in) averred that to her patience and tendance the sick man owed his life.

She had grown fond of the blind child, too, in her own silent way, and had taught the little one how to perform many offices for the patient, which she would have feared to attempt alone. Molly was as quick and as sensitive as the blind so often are, and made up for the lack of one faculty by the preternatural acuteness of others; thus she was an apt pupil, and was rapidly learning under Janet's care to be a first-rate little cook and housekeeper.

Now, stealing softly into the room with hushed tread, she whispered to Janet that the lady of Ernscliff was below and would like to speak to her.

Tom was just beginning to take notice of what went on about him, and his hollow eyes turned eagerly upon Molly.

'The lady!' he said in a voice that was little more than a whisper. 'Please to give her my humble duty, and thank her for all she has done. It fair shames me when I think——'

'Then don't think, ye senseless loon,' retorted Janet with her customary sharpness, which, Tom had learnt to know, disguised kindlier feelings. 'Haven't I bid ye stop thinking

at least a dozen times this very day? It's to get better the young leddy asks of ye, and to think is the best way to stop that;' and then Janet bustled off downstairs, leaving Tom alone with his blind sister.

But it was one thing to tell Tom not to think, and quite another to enforce the order. As his bodily health returned, and freedom from pain left his mind at liberty, memory returned with sharp stabs of shame and remorse, and it appeared to Tom as though no creature in the wide world had ever been half so vile as he.

It was not as though his conversion had been a mere passing phase of feeling, engendered by his terror in the fire and the narrowness of his escape from peril. It might have been in part due to those immediate causes, but it had taken deep hold upon his mind, and had stood the test of a whole year. There had always been much that was fine and even noble in Tom Heron's nature, but his circumstances and surroundings had been against him, and that mystery of inherited wildness which ran in his very veins helped to make of him the reckless ne'er-do-well who had been at once the pride and the terror of Sax. But with a heart-felt conviction of sin, new feelings had awakened within him, and he had repented earnestly, and had struggled fiercely against temptation and vice. He had believed that he had conquered. He had believed that his old sins had ceased to have power upon him. He had not been happy, but this he had looked upon as the natural consequence of his constant self-denial, and of his conscientious withdrawal from the society of his fellow-men. He had been almost proud to show the world that he could live his life alone; that he had broken off from all the pleasures and interests of the past, and was no longer one of those who rely upon their companions for support and assistance of any kind. And after living thus and beginning to think himself safe from all temptation, how had he fallen! He could not ask the question of himself without groaning aloud, and Janet

Dawson was not the most cheerful of companions or counsellors when he did uncloset his lips to her.

‘If you be one of the elect, you will be saved; but if not you will be damned,’ was the burden of her talk, and Tom did not feel that it was any consolation to hear such doctrine. For one thing, he did not believe it. He still held firmly to the creed taught by his Methodist friends, that repentance and faith were sufficient for salvation. But it seemed to him, as he lay there, that sin such as his was almost too black for pardon; moreover, in his enfeebled state, he was unable to call up that passionate remorse and agony of mind which he thought was necessary to true conviction; and he believed that his conscience was seared as with a hot iron, that his heart was turned to stone, and could never be broken and made meet for the atoning blood of Christ.

So he fell into a state of profound melancholy, from which nothing seemed to rouse him. Janet Dawson went back to her own home, and only paid him visits from time to time, and little Molly waited on him hand and foot, whilst his old friends from the village would drop in from time to time and cheer him up. But nothing seemed to produce any effect upon him. Mr. Hugh from Rookwood and Mr. Latham the clergyman visited him, and did all they could to lighten the burden of his sorrow; but their words never seemed to reach him, and though he no longer repulsed their friendly overtures, it did not appear as though their teaching had any beyond the most transitory effect upon his mind.

Yet, with all this against him, his bodily health improved; and as soon as the milder weather had fairly set in, he was able to crawl down the narrow staircase into the little living-room below, which Molly kept in beautiful order; and sometimes by the aid of a stick and the child’s shoulder to creep round the little garden which was bright with spring flowers.

‘It is Jos who keeps it all so nice,’ explained Molly; ‘Jos and Mike between them. They are so kind to me. They come almost every day, and do so many things for me.’

Tom sighed ; he wondered why people were kind to him. He felt so little worthy of kindness. But Michael Portway and Jos Dawson were friends of whom he was not ashamed. They had never been led into the excesses of which he had been guilty. He could trust them as he could trust few besides ; whilst they plainly showed that they were no mere fair-weather friends, but valued his friendship for its own sake. Just now, however, Tom was past caring for the companionship of any of his old friends. He passed his days in hopeless brooding, and his nights were disturbed by shifting dreams and fevered fancies. The stronger his body grew, the more this gloom seemed to take hold of him, and he would sit for hours, sometimes for half a day together, with his head buried in his hands, not thinking exactly, still less reading or studying, but brooding in dark despair over his past and future alike, feeling himself a hopeless outcast from his fellow-men, abandoned by the evil and the good.

It was upon one of these dark moods of dreary despair that Mary Ernscliff broke, when one day she stepped unannounced across the threshold of the cottage to find Tom alone there. She had discovered by this time that to take him by surprise would be the only way of obtaining an interview with him. His shame and shrinking were so great that he had avoided meeting her face to face all this time ; and though his gratitude and reverential admiration remained unshaken, he felt as though it would kill him to meet the clear glance of her sweet eyes, knowing himself the vile creature he felt himself to be.

Mary had found this out from Molly some time ago, and so she had just taken her difficult charge by surprise. It was some time before she could overcome his strange, fierce shyness, and induce him to resume his seat and open his lips in her presence. But Mary Ernscliff had herself known deep sorrow, which gave her quick and keen insight into the minds of others, and she had what the poor of her neighbourhood were fond of calling 'a way with her,' that sooner or

later won confidence and broke down reserve. At last she got even poor, lonely hearted, despairing Tom to speak to her of his heavy load of sorrow, and after listening to his burst of wild, passionate words, she said, very gently,—

‘I think, Tom, that the best thing for you will be to see Mr. Wesley himself. Mr. Latham has written to him, and he has said that he is soon coming north, and will turn aside to see you, if it will be a comfort to you to speak with him face to face.’

A sudden light sprang into Tom’s eyes. He had never seen the great revivalist minister as yet, but he had long looked up to him as to his father in God. One of his most bitter troubles now was in the doubts which assailed him as to the truth of the doctrines taught by his late leaders, since when last he had seen them, they had been at fierce enmity between themselves. To see Mr. Wesley had been the dream of his recent life; it had been the one hope which buoyed him up during these last dismal weeks—the hope that if once he recovered his strength he might set forth on foot to find him, even if he had to go barefoot half the way. And now this wonderful offer was made him by the lady of Ernscliff, he could not understand it. Was she not one of the most regular attendants at church? And did not Glegg declare that no churchman could possibly be a Methodist? He was fairly puzzled.

‘But, ma’am,’ he stammered, ‘this is your house; and you belong to the Church.’

‘Of which Mr. Wesley is an ordained minister,’ answered Mary, with a smile. ‘Would you wish to see him, Tom?’

‘I would give my right hand to do it, ma’am. I believe he could save my soul—and that nobody but he can. But—but——’

‘It is Christ and He alone who can do that, Tom,’ answered the lady gently; ‘but if Mr. Wesley can point the way to you more clearly than another it is right that you should see him, and see him you shall. We are not all

made alike, and we know that he possesses wonderful power over the human heart. Did you think that he taught some new religion, Tom? Why should we be afraid to let him come amongst us?’

Tom had heard plenty of vehement partisan talk on both sides, but he was not apt at putting his thoughts into words.

‘I thought Church folks was dead against him,’ was all the answer he was able to make.

‘Perhaps what you and I mean by the Church is not quite the same,’ answered Mary, her luminous glance bent upon the young man’s perplexed face. ‘Deeply as I love and revere the Established Church of this land, with its liturgy, its creeds, its ordinances, which I hold to be God-given, and which I know have been given for our help and guidance (Mr. Wesley will tell you just the same, if you ask him), I freely own that there is a wider Church, embracing this and much besides; a Church of which, thank God, all true Christians are members; a Church which would fain gather the whole world within its fold; and to that Church, Tom, you belong, and I trust that you will do noble work in its cause. Some day, I believe, you will see as I see now, that between the members of that Church there should be nothing but brotherly love and harmony; but it is a hard lesson to learn, for it is in human nature to raise disputes, and to grow bitter over small differences, forgetting that at heart we all own one God, one Saviour, and are taught by one Holy Spirit.’

This certainly was a new idea to Tom, and one he could not altogether assimilate; but something of its spirit entered into his mind as he sat gazing into the face of his visitor, and in days to come he realised more and more the truth of that word.

Just at this present crisis of his life he was fully convinced that none but a Methodist could be of any help to him; and accordingly a few weeks later all Sax was electrified with astonishment by the news that Mr. John Wesley had spent

a night at Ernscliff, that Mr. Latham had met him there, and had spent the whole evening in talk, and that Tom Heron had been visited in his own cottage by the great preacher, who was going on the morrow to take him away with him for some special work amongst his own people.

It was Michael Portway who brought this astounding piece of news to Sax. Mike said he had been present at a portion of the interview between Tom and the preacher, as had also Jos Dawson, who had always had a leaning towards the Methodists. Mike said that Mr. Wesley spoke wonderful words, and it was plain that a great impression had been produced upon his own mind. He reported that Tom had appeared like a new creature ever since he knew that Mr. Wesley was near, and that his strength seemed to come back in full force as soon as he heard the offer made him of working under the great man.

'Will he give us a preaching here before he goes?' asked a number of eager persons; and even Glegg was heard to mutter that he thought Wesley might as well let them hear what he could do before he went away. Mike, however, knew nothing about that. He had heard say that the start was to be made next morning at nine o'clock, and that Tom was to be provided with a serviceable nag out of the Ernscliff stables; but beyond that his knowledge did not go, and the sleep of Sax was disturbed that night, wondering what the next morning would bring forth.

Almost the whole village was gathered together around the open space about the forge next morning, when the cry arose that the expected travellers were coming. Tom Heron was riding a strong animal, well known by sight to the whole place, and he held his head erect, with something of the old fearless look in his eyes, though it was tempered by many other feelings harder to analyse. Beside him was a small, spare man, also well mounted, with a striking face and very penetrating eyes. The crowd, muttering the name of Mr. Wesley, fell back and stood unrestrainedly.

Samson stepped forward and spoke a heartfelt blessing upon his nephew, to which his companion responded by a fervent 'Amen.' Some of the people gathering courage, pressed nearer and asked him to address them; but Wesley only looked round him with a smile.

'My friends,' he said, 'those of you who need teaching, go you to church and hear it from your own clergyman. I have no message for you that you will not hear as well or better from his lips. Go to church—go to church, every man of you. If all the parishes in this land were supplied as Sax is, I should not be what I am to-day;' and with a friendly nod to those about him the great man rode upon his way, and Tom Heron of Sax rode beside him.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SUMMER AT SAX.

MADAM was gracious and almost beaming. In the exaltation of mind induced by her son's marriage with Athol, she had almost forgotten her past grievances. Tom Heron had vanished from Sax (though he had not been expelled in the fashion she would have liked), and with him had departed that incipient hankering after new teachers and preachers which had threatened to disturb the quiet of the place. The little church had never been so well attended as it was now. Despite the 'innovations' introduced by Mr. Latham, now that he had a coadjutor in the person of Hugh Fortescue, the services appeared on the whole to give satisfaction; at any rate they aroused interest and brought the whole place to church, where Mr. Latham's earnest discourses were listened to with far more of real interest than ever they had been before.

Madam gently plumed herself upon this as an evidence of her own power in the place; and whatever credit she did not assume to herself she passed on to Hugh, pleased that a Fortescue should have been the means of drawing back the straying flock to their own lawful shepherd. Nobody contradicted or argued with her, and she was left free to indulge her self-satisfied dreams to the full.

The marriage of her eldest son with his cousin Athol had been an event of no small interest, and had pleasantly occupied her mind during the months of May and June. The newly married couple had now gone away, to travel about and see the world a little; but in the autumn Fulk

was to bring back his bride, and the two were to take up their abode in one of the wings of Rookwood, which was to be divided from the rest of the house so as to form an independent establishment. The squire could not bear the idea of losing his eldest son entirely, and was anxious that Fulk should remain at Sax, growing into the life and occupations which would one day be his. The young man himself had no objection, and Athol raised no obstacle to the plan. She might have preferred a more independent position than could ever be hers so long as madam remained the mistress of Rookwood ; but independence was less the habit of mind with women in those days than it has since become, and Athol was attached to her old neighbourhood, and resigned herself very easily to the thought of remaining there.

As for Irene, she had gradually lived down her disgrace. Whenever madam wished to be unwontedly scathing in her criticisms of Methodism and its results, she would cite her daughter's case with subdued triumph, and Irene would quiver and tingle with shame and pain ; but her father had soon ceased to look gravely upon her, and Hugh was always a staunch friend and supporter, so that life had become more endurable than once she thought it ever could ; and she herself was learning to understand that she could receive just the same food from her brother and her parish minister that once she had believed was only to be found in the ranks of the Methodists, to obtain which she would be forced to disobey her parents, acting either openly in defiance of their wishes or setting herself to deceive and circumvent them.

One difficulty at an end, however, Irene found herself face to face with another. Hardly had Athol and Fulk taken their departure, than madam, always eager for some object of absorbing interest upon which to concentrate her attention, turned her mind once again upon the thought of the marriage of her daughter. It was high time, she said, that something should be settled ; and Irene, coming in one day

from a ride with her father, found herself called into her mother's boudoir—a sacred spot she never penetrated without an inward qualm of misgiving. Madam's face was on this occasion, however, very suave and gracious.

'Irene,' she said, and the girl felt at once that something of importance was coming; no one could be long in madam's presence without being aware of the iron hand beneath the velvet glove, 'Lord Lovel is coming very shortly to Wilton Abbots, if he is not there already. We are certain to see a good deal of him these next months, and I wish you fully to understand what is expected of you.'

Irene's colour went and came.

'Expected of me, ma'am?'

'Expected of you, my dear. You must by this time be perfectly well aware of my meaning. Lord Lovel has done you the honour to solicit the right to pay his addresses to you, and your father and I have been pleased to grant him that permission. He is in every way a suitable match for you, and is one of the most charming men I have ever seen. You are a very fortunate girl, and I only hope you will show a proper appreciation of your good fortune in having secured the attachment of such an eligible husband.'

Irene started as the word fell upon her ear, but these last months had been teaching her lessons of patience, filial respect, and a wider toleration. Her face expressed considerable perplexity and distress, but she did not attempt a reply. Madam watched her keenly, and her next words were very pointedly spoken.

'You have disappointed us grievously once, Irene, doing much to forfeit our trust and provoke our deep displeasure. If you wish to show that your sorrow is sincere, and that you are willing in the future to atone for the wilfulness and folly of the past, you will allow yourself to be guided in this crisis of your life by the wishes and the commands of your parents. You know well what your defiance of their wishes led you into before; let that be a warning to you, and try to

believe in the future that they do know better than you can do what is good for you to do and to think.'

Irene made no reply, but quickly escaped from her mother's presence, and took the first opportunity of speaking to Hugh alone, asking him how she could escape the fate of being married to a man for whom she felt neither affection nor respect. She passed, indeed, such severe strictures upon Lord Lovel's worldliness and frivolity that Hugh could not restrain a smile.

'My dear sister,' he said, 'be just a little less impetuous. Perhaps you may slightly misjudge this young man, attributing to him more of evil than he really deserves, and forgetting in what an atmosphere of temptation he always lives. I knew him a little at Oxford, and I liked the little I knew, though we were in different colleges, and he left before I had completed my second year. Perhaps he is one of the men who might be led to better things by the influence of one to whom he was sincerely attached, and——'

'How can he be attached to me?' questioned Irene, with heightened colour. 'I have scarce spoken to him more than a few dozen times, and we never agreed about anything. I know he thought me dull and stupid; and I thought him——'

'Never mind what you thought him. If he comes here, try, just for the sake of pleasing our parents, to see the best side of him instead of the worst. If I remember right, there was something very winning and fascinating about him. Perhaps if you were to try to bring out the best side of his nature, you might find him different from what you have believed. Think what a happy thing it would be for you, or any one, to have been instrumental in turning a brilliant youth in a high position to take life and its responsibilities more seriously—to win him over to the side of right—the side of Christ. We each of us have some work to do in the world for our fellow-men. Dear sister, it may be that this is the work you are called upon to do for God. If this young

man did not love you, why should he seek you? He could find many maidens as well-dowered and as well-born as you. But he still returns to your side. He must prize your love for its own sake. If that be so, it may indeed be yours to do a great work for him. What think you of that, dear sister?’

Perhaps, had Hugh not been young and ardent, and full of enthusiasm himself, he would have scarcely tried to urge upon his sister the somewhat perilous office of interesting herself in the reclamation of one who approached her as a lover. A wider experience of life might have taught him the lesson that a man generally proves the stronger under such circumstances, and that when he has won the heart of the woman, who fondly and faithfully believes that he will learn to think as she does, he too often draws her away from her own faith by the seeming strength of his own plausible arguments. At the same time, as truth is always stronger than falsehood, and right will win its way, even over might, the victory by no means always remains with the seeming conqueror. Nevertheless, the experiment is a perilous one for the young to make, though one which has been successfully carried out many times, and will be many more, and for which there can be no better weapon than the deep unwavering faith which had been given alike to brother and sister, and which the experiences of the past months had deepened in Irene to something vastly more strong and lasting than the mere exaltation of a passing wave of emotion, which she had once mistaken for the faith which moves mountains.

Hugh’s words raised within her feelings of an entirely new kind—feelings which gave an impulse to her whole character. Hitherto she had been, from circumstances as well as temperament, decidedly self-centred. Now it seemed to her that she had perhaps a work to do for her Master. She spent long hours in prayer for guidance—guidance as to whether this work was to be hers—and if so, for grace to do it aright. She prayed for the young man who was in

the eyes of the world her lover, and prayed for strength to act rightly in the coming crisis of her life.

Thus, when Lord Lovel appeared, the old prejudice against him had quite melted. She no longer steeled her heart against him, condemning him as a hopeless reprobate; and accordingly she found that he had many generous and even noble traits of character, in addition to the winning address, which she had always found it rather hard to resist. And he for his part was simply charmed with her. He had always admired her, even when she repelled him; and though he had many times retired from her society in vexation and pique, half-resolved to withdraw his claim upon her hand, yet he never could get over the feeling that there was something more behind, if he could but get at it, whilst he had never seen another face which attracted him in the same way. He had been vexed at the persistence with which the thought of Irene haunted him, and he came to Rookwood with the full determination to win the lady's hand once and for all, or to confess himself beaten and retire finally from the field. To find her thus softened—so much sweeter and more approachable, was delightful to him; and as he grew to know her better, he found unexpected depths in her nature which interested and sometimes awed him. He felt that she drew out the better qualities of his own heart. Before her he felt deeply ashamed of follies and faults which he had regarded lightly enough before. He felt that if he could but win her for his wife, he would turn over a new leaf. He began to speak to her of matters that were not mere surface things, and her quick sympathy and understanding were a revelation to him of a union of soul with soul which had certainly never been dreamed of in his philosophy before.

Hugh watched this little drama with unfeigned interest and pleasure, and did all in his power to deepen the impression being made upon the mind of his former friend. There was much in the atmosphere of Sax just now to

strike the young man, who had hitherto been content to be a mere pleasure-seeker, and had hardly troubled his head for an hour over the deeper aspects of life, or given any serious heed to the burning questions of the day. His first Sunday was a revelation to him. He had seldom heard a sermon which so struck and moved him as did Mr. Latham's, preached from the text, 'Surely I come quickly'; whilst the number of communicants who remained after the service ended likewise surprised him greatly. He himself remained, and knelt beside Irene at the Lord's table for the first time, save one, in his whole life before.

When they came out of church he was full of eager questions about the clergyman.

'He was my old tutor. I was under him during my first year at Oxford, and then he left, for his health would not stand the strain of teaching. I used to think I might have been a better man if he had stayed. Where does he live now? I must go and see him. But how fearfully ill he looks! I should say he had one foot in the grave already.'

'Oh, don't say that!' cried Irene; 'we are so fond of Mr. Latham; he has done such good. I am glad you have known him too. To-morrow you shall go and see him. On Sunday he is too busy, and he has no strength to spare.'

The next day young Lord Lovel went in search of his old tutor, and found him in his own humble quarters. Mr. Latham lodged with a widow in a little rose-covered cottage, just in the fork of the road to Ernscliff, where one of the lanes deflected to the right in the direction of Sheepwold Farm. The house was on the Ernscliff property; though the rooms were small, they were spotlessly clean, and the clergyman had always gratefully declined any offer on the part of Mary to enlarge them for him. His wants were very few, he truly said, and he had everything that he needed there—rest for the body and peace for the mind. Indeed, he carried that peace about in his own heart, and it seemed to shine out of the depths of his hollow eyes, as he rose

from the easy chair in which he was resting—for Monday always found him in a very languid and weary state—and welcomed his old pupil with warmth and pleasure.

‘I thought I knew the face when I saw it in church, but I scarcely hoped to be remembered myself. I am very glad to see you.’

‘I wish I found you looking better, sir. I am afraid you are in very poor health. You should have stayed at Oxford; good men are wanted there. It was a thousand pities to throw yourself away on a country curacy. You are killing yourself over parish work, and you might have been a power in Oxford.’

The clergyman smiled as he heard these words.

‘I had a call from my Master,’ he answered, ‘and I could not choose but obey. He gave me a very little corner of His vineyard to till. Doubtless, I was not fit for a larger share. All I can hope is that I have done that small work faithfully. What more can any of us hope than to be found faithful unto the end, found watching when the Lord shall appear?’

The young man made no direct reply, but his face expressed no impatience and no embarrassment. He was interested, impressed even, but he knew not what to respond. He looked round the narrow chamber and said,—

‘Surely this is no fit place for you. Come, sir, let me speak to you freely, and trust you not to misunderstand me or think—think that I want to patronise. I know better what your value is—and my worthlessness; but I have a rectory vacant; it is not very valuable, but it would be better than this, and there is at least a good house attached, and it is near Wilton Abbots, where I hope soon to settle down,’ and the young man blushed. ‘I wish you would let me nominate you to it; you could keep a curate to do the work, and take your ease, and give yourself to study and rest. You have worked hard enough, I am sure; it is time that you should think of yourself now.’

A very strange and beautiful smile played over Mr. Latham's face. He put out his hand and took that of the young nobleman.

'My dear lad,' he said, 'I thank you from my heart. It does me good to feel that I am kindly remembered by those I knew years ago, to whom I strove to do my duty—imperfectly as that duty was done. I thank you most gratefully for your offer. I ask you not to think it from lack of gratitude that I do not accept it. Let me counsel you to be very careful whom you select for the office. Strive for a man of piety and earnestness and zeal. Thank God there are such pastors still left, and I hope and believe that the time has come when He will raise up many more. But for me, my work lies here, in my little corner where Providence has led me.'

'But you have done your work here, and you have worn yourself out. It is rest and ease that you need now.'

'And rest is coming—it is very near now,' answered Mr. Latham, with his radiant and luminous smile. 'I need not seek it; it is coming as the gift of One who sees the need of each child of His, and gives to each one according to his need.'

'But you might recover in another place!' cried the young man, with some vehemence. 'That is another reason to leave. In this cottage what comforts can you have?'

'Everything that I have need of, my kind young friend, and the love of those amongst whom I once feared I had laboured in vain. Kind faces look in at my window with a smile of good-will; sweet voices speak soothing words to me day by day. I have my books about me, my flock at my very doors; the sounds and the scents of the beautiful world are around me, and my Master is always at hand. What more can heart of man desire? I have been very abundantly blessed, and in calm and reverent hope I am content to wait for that one last final blessing which shall make me—either in life or death—one with Him for whom we wait.'

Lord Lovel went away awed and impressed, perplexed in

part, but in no spirit of scorn. Every day he found his way to that rose-covered cottage, drawn thither by a power he could scarce understand; and every day he came away strengthened and confirmed in the new purposes rising within him, more resolved to break through the fetters of old habit and old association, and to strive after the higher life he now began to realise and appreciate in others.

Mr. Latham had other visitors too at this time; the ladies of Ernscliff came almost daily, if he were too feeble to walk up the hill to their house; but the visits he valued almost more than these of friendship were those paid him regularly by Michael Portway and Jos Dawson. These two youths had been greatly impressed by the change wrought in their comrade since his conversion, and following the advice of Mr. Wesley, they had turned for counsel to their clergyman, and had been receiving regular instruction from him, with the result that, although they had not passed through Tom's phases of strong excitement and instantaneous conversion, they were brought by slow and sure degrees to the knowledge of their Saviour, and had set an example in the place which others were beginning to follow.

'At evening-time it shall be light.' These words were often on the lips of the dying clergyman during these bright summer days, when his lamp was burning very low, though with a clear brightness that caused its beams to be widely diffused—as he sat beside his open casement and watched the golden glow in the western sky. By the time the harvest fields were yellow, and ready for the reaper's hand, Mr. Latham was unable to leave the house, and those who still desired to see him had to seek him in his tiny cottage home. Hugh Fortescue removed himself from Rookwood, and took up his abode beneath the same roof, nursing his senior and friend with filial devotion. Every day the young man felt that his soul was strengthened and elevated by communion with one who seemed to be almost within the borders of the unseen land. And it was to the side of the sick man's couch

that Lord Lovel, one glowing evening in September, led the blushing Irene to tell his old tutor that he had found the bride of his choice, and to ask his blessing upon their union.

Most fervent and earnest was that blessing. Irene bent her head whilst the tears filled her eyes, and she felt as though it was indeed the seal of God upon the first love of her heart, sanctifying it and dedicating it to Him from whom all pure love comes. A few very solemn and earnest words were spoken by the dying man to the young nobleman—warnings against temptation, exhortation to meet all such in a humble, prayerful spirit ; solemn injunctions against daring to try and tamper with the faith of his betrothed wife, either now or at any future time ; and with these warnings and cautions a very deep and heartfelt blessing upon the union which had in it so much of promise and hope.

‘You will please your parents in this thing, my child,’ he said, detaining Irene for a moment when Lord Lovel turned to go. ‘And it is a happy thing that you have not been called upon to choose betwixt their wishes and your own conscience. Be true to the teachings of that conscience through life. Let not the things of this world draw your heart away from the great and eternal hope of the coming of the Lord. Be always ready for Him when He shall appear ; let Him find you watching and waiting : but let Him find you doing your duty—your whole duty—in that high station of life to which it has pleased Him to call you. Do not let small scruples worry you ; look ever to the large issues of life, the wide teaching of our Bible ; do not fret over little things, but avoid firmly and steadfastly all that raises up a barrier betwixt you and God, all that you do not feel you can ask His blessing upon. And now farewell, my dear child. In this world, perchance, we may not meet again ; but I trust the day will come when we shall all stand together with the Lamb upon Mount Zion, and be for ever with the Lord.’

That same night the call came, and the spirit of the clergyman passed peacefully away. Hugh Fortescue, who felt that

the end was near, would not leave him, as he wished, but remained with him through the night, and just at dawn the mysterious change came which he had seen before and knew well.

‘My dear lad,’ he said faintly, ‘I thought I saw you and Mary Ernscliff walking hand in hand over some stony path together, smoothing, toiling, working, ever together. Was it a dream, or was it a vision of what will come?’

Hugh made no attempt to answer. His deep love for Mary Ernscliff, though scarcely admitted to himself, had been divined by his friend, and had just once been named between them before. A strange thrill shot through Hugh as he heard these words; but at such a moment even that thought was but secondary in his mind.

Kneeling beside the bed, and taking in his own the cold and lifeless hand, he asked in broken words for the blessing of the faithful pastor and friend, who was going out so fearlessly into the dark valley.

Calmly and steadily was that blessing given, and with it a solemn last charge to his successor—for such he felt Hugh to be—to feed the flock; to be a true and faithful pastor.

‘And remember especially Tom Heron’—such was one of the last whispered charges of the dying man—‘remember him in your prayers. If he should return, comfort, help, and strengthen him, confirm his faith, and help him to fight the battle to which he is now pledged.’

‘I will,’ answered Hugh in strangled accents; and then in answer to a look—an unspoken request—he rose to his feet and solemnly pronounced over the dying man the last prayer of commendation.

As those solemn words were spoken the silver cord was loosed, but the dark valley was not dark to one who was treading it in steadfast faith—certain of finding in it the road to Him who has said,—

‘I am the Resurrection and the Life.’

CHAPTER XX.

WITH NELSON IN NOTTINGHAM.

I SHALL leave you under the care of my very good friend John Nelson. He is about to start upon a round of visiting, and will have some stiff work to do, I doubt not, in some of the places whither he is going. I think that you, my friend, will be an excellent companion for him. I think that you will have work and to spare of a kind that will be congenial to you. If I mistake you not, you are of the stuff that fights gallantly upon the weaker side.'

So spoke Mr. Wesley to Tom Heron, after the latter had travelled with him for some days, attending upon him with all reverence, feeling honoured even to be permitted to act as the servant of the great preacher, though Mr. Wesley was singularly independent of any personal attendance, and treated Tom rather as a friend and brother than the humble servitor he fain would be. At every preaching and meeting along the road the young blacksmith was present, a most attentive hearer, drinking in knowledge with the greatest avidity, and feeling his faith strengthened and confirmed each day as it passed by.

It had not occurred to him to reason about the future; he had not asked why he was taken from Sax, or what his work was to be. All he knew was that the lady of Ernscliff had promised to care for Molly in his absence, and had given to him a sum of money sufficient to defray the cost of his modest wants for some considerable time. She had told him that she thought there was work for him to do beyond the precincts of Sax, and Mr. Wesley had said the same. He had, therefore, gone forth without questioning or wondering,

prepared to act under orders, and trusting that his way would be made plain before him. So long as Mr. Wesley was his companion he felt that he had no need to ask whither they were going or what his duty was to be. It was enough to be with him, drinking in his words, receiving a continual feast of instruction, and learning to view life and the work in which he hoped to be engaged with a wider grasp of its real aim and object. He began to feel ashamed of the bitter way he had turned from Mr. Latham's attempts at consolation, resolving that he could and would only hear those who were called in the world by the name of Methodists. With the wider views of life he now began to take, came wider comprehension of eternal truths, and a sense of expansion and elevation was the result, which was in strange contrast to his old depression and despair.

When he heard that he was to join Nelson, he felt a thrill of mingled regret and pleasure—regret at leaving his present master, pleasure at being with the one whose words first aroused within him a sense of his own sinfulness and the eternal mercy of God. But his common-sense told him that he could not always follow Mr. Wesley in his wide journeyings, and he started forth with a high courage and a heart full of zeal for the work that awaited him with his old guide, Nelson.

'I am bound for Nottingham, Tom Heron,' was one of the first words spoken to him by the stone-mason, as he looked up from the letter which Tom delivered to him from Mr. Wesley. 'I shall be glad of the company of a man of thews and sinews—not that I would willingly repel force by force; but there be times when it is well to show that we can stand up against assaults of bone and muscle. The pair of us, Tom, will not, I think, be afraid to face any mob in the world.'

Tom smiled, and the eager sparkle in his eye showed that the fighting instinct was not altogether conquered in him yet. Nelson saw this and smiled, laying his arm upon that of his new coadjutor.

'Softly, my young friend; we will not fight with fists save

in defence of our own persons. We will even then strike no blow, but only ward them off. And now, friend Tom, tell me how it has been with thee these past years since I saw thee last? By what Mr. Wesley tells me of thee, I should say that thou hadst passed through deep waters.'

'Ay, truly I think I have done,' answered Tom; 'but I trust I have come safe through them to the other side. Since I have been with Mr. Wesley I have felt all my doubts and troubles vanishing away. But I will gladly tell thee all my tale, though it is a bitter one to bring to mind.'

'Then save it for the morrow, when we ride forth together. It will beguile the way, and that way is something long. Dost thou know this part of the country, or is it new to thee?'

'I know little save what lies betwixt my own village and the city of York,' answered Tom. 'Tell me of this town of Nottingham. Is it like York?'

'In no wise; albeit it is a fine place, as these smaller cities go. But the people are turbulent and riotous, and there be many that stir up strife whenever the Word of the Lord is preached among them. It follows that the mayor and aldermen mislike our coming, for they say that we stir up the people to mischief, and many times we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us. But I thank God He never leaves us to the mercy of the mob. His angel of the covenant is ever watching over us. I have been in many perils, but never one that has hurt. As we ride to-morrow I will tell thee more. But you have doubtless heard and seen something of it with Mr. Wesley.'

'All men were very anxious to hear him. There were no riots when he stood up to preach.'

'I thank the Lord that He hath so turned men's hearts; but again and again he has been in fearful peril, it has seemed as if naught could save him but a miracle, and yet he hath come out scarce scathed from the tumult. Surely the Lord is watching over him, else some mischief must have assuredly befallen him ere now.'

Upon the following morning Tom set forth with his new companion, the two leaving the little body of brethren, and journeying alone towards Nottingham.

As they rode Tom told all his history to Nelson, not keeping back any detail ; and it was listened to with profound interest. The only thing which was now troubling Tom was the fear that he had not been truly converted, because no very sudden and overwhelming change had come over him this second time, as it had done upon the occasion of his first conviction of sin, when the brothers Holdsworthy and Seaforth had prayed over him as he lay stricken in York.

He had then felt no doubt as to his conversion ; but he had turned back again to his sins, and this time—notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Wesley himself had come and talked with him and prayed over him—he had been conscious of only a gradual diffusion of peace and comfort, not of any sudden illumination, penetrating like a flash of lightning the dark pall of cloud that had enwrapped him, and making him know and see all in a moment that his sins were blotted out and forgiven. Indeed, Tom said that he still felt them to be something of a burden. He looked back to much in the immediate past with pain and shame ; and though he had truly repented, and believed that his sins were forgiven him, he had not received any overwhelming and irresistible conviction on the subject. Nelson himself looked a little grave as he heard this, for the doctrine of instantaneous conversion was deeply rooted in his mind, and his experience had been favourable to the growth of that belief. Still, he spoke encouragingly to Tom, and advised him to be instant in prayer, that he might receive the full assurance of pardon, and that at some given moment—instantaneously. But he would not have him discouraged because the sense of free and full pardon was withheld for a time. Possibly this was God's way of punishing him for that sad relapse into sin after he had been pulled out of the slough, and washed white in the Blood of the Lamb. He was sorry the matter had not

been fully discussed with Mr. Wesley, who would, doubtless, have given him much good counsel; but at least Tom was now treading the narrow path, and perhaps, in fulness of time, a fresh outpouring of blessing might be given to him.

So it was in a very humble spirit that Tom reached the destination for which they were bound, and rode with his companion through the imperfectly lighted streets of Nottingham.

‘We will go to Mary White’s,’ said Nelson. ‘She is a godly woman, and hath a comfortable house, where we may conveniently lodge, and a room where we may see the brethren and hold a meeting for prayer and praise. I have lodged with her before, and doubtless she will look for us again. Some of the Society know that we are coming this way at this time.’

It was very interesting to Tom to see with what eagerness and delight his companion was welcomed at the small and unpretentious house where they presently stopped. It was plain that they were expected, for the door immediately opened, two or three men stepped out to take the horses, and Tom found that there was an assembly of full a score of persons awaiting the preacher in the large parlour of the house.

Although the travellers had ridden forty miles since morning, and had scarce broken their fast all that time, Nelson immediately declared it his intention of addressing the little assembly; and his exhortation was followed by a prayer-meeting of no small duration of time, in which almost half the persons present engaged at some time or another in prayer; and, to his own great astonishment, Tom Heron felt powerfully constrained to uplift his own voice in a short but very earnest supplication. It was the first time that the need of utterance had ever been felt by him, and it startled him more than it surprised any of those present. His words were few, but they were eloquent with deep feeling, and when the little company rose from their knees many shook him by the hand and hoped that they would hear him again.

The young man felt confused and abashed. He had had no intention of thus distinguishing himself, and felt utterly

unfit to pray or to preach before others ; but his friend Nelson, as at last they sat at their much-needed supper together, told him frankly that if it pleased God to give him the faculty of speech, he must not shrink from using it to His glory. And he went on to tell him of his own reluctance in his early life to address his brethren, and how unfit and unsuitable he had felt for the task ; but that he had obeyed the behests of those who were his own teachers, and had found that grace was always given sufficient for the task in hand.

Tom listened in silence, secretly hoping that no such charge would ever be given to him, and feeling that a less suitable man to teach others could scarcely be found on the face of the earth ; but no more was said upon the subject then, and the weary travellers retired to their beds, and slept the sleep of those who have earned their repose, though at dawn they were up and about again, preparing for the day's work.

This work, as Tom was now to find, was no sinecure. The little society in Nottingham was in the same need of guiding, feeding, and directing, as was the case in all places where the Methodists had been. There had been a complete split in the camp here on the vexed question of election and free-will, and a small party had entirely divided from the rest, to set up a small meeting-room of their own, no longer owning the sway of John Wesley but calling themselves disciples of Mr. Whitefield.

Nelson attempted no dealings with these persons, though he held a heated argument with their delegates, who came to see if he had not abandoned the errors of his way, and reached their way of thinking.

Tom listened with some satisfaction to his master's eloquent asseverations of the saving virtue of faith in Christ, as he quoted passage after passage to prove that Christ had died for all, and that if men were born to fore-ordained damnation or salvation, there could be no need to preach the Word to them in any form, for God's decree could not be altered, and that for the damned ones to call upon His Name

was the very mockery of fate. It seemed to the young neophyte that his leader came off with flying colours in the strife ; but there always was a painful impression left upon his mind that there were certain arguments on the other side not answered, but only evaded. Tom was too clear-headed not to see that certain texts quoted by the Calvinists with regard to predestination were never really explained away. He did not like to admit this even to himself ; but he was dimly conscious of it, and always came away from these discussions with the uncomfortable feeling in his mind that in some slight degree the Bible was divided against itself. His own faith *in* faith never wavered ; but he wished that instead of quoting multitudes of texts in favour of saving faith, its champions would answer and refute those passages in which it certainly appeared as though God had taught the doctrine of predestination to damnation or salvation. But when he tried to ask this explanation from Nelson, he was met with another of his outbreaks of weighty Scriptural statements appearing to bear on the other side ; and it seemed to him as though this were the only way out of the difficulty—to weigh the balance of argument for and against, and to find, as he and his friends had done, that it preponderated vastly upon the side of free grace and salvation by faith.

If the method were not entirely satisfactory, at least there was little time to think about it now. Already many hours had passed by in meetings with the brethren, and in holding discourse of various kinds with them ; and now the time had come for a preaching in an open place in the town, which preaching might at any time be interrupted by the mob. Tom walked beside the preacher as he threaded the narrow streets to the market-place, and placed himself near to him, when he took up his position there to address the crowd. Tom Heron's voice was very serviceable in leading the hymn with which the service commenced ; and at its conclusion Nelson preached one of his bold and rugged

sermons, holding his audience spell-bound, and causing many to tremble and become overwhelmed with the conviction of sin.

There was no open demonstration of hostility, though Tom, who was keenly watching the aspect of the crowd, saw many scowling faces on the outskirts, and several times felt certain that some outbreak was about to commence. However, the preaching passed by peaceably, and he and Nelson had returned home to the house, and were talking over the events of the day, when there was the sound of a tumult in the street, followed by a loud knocking at the door.

‘It is the constable—and a mob of people at his heels!’ cried Mary White, putting her head in at the door. ‘Oh, dear sirs, will you not escape out by the back door, whilst I answer the summons at the front?’

‘No, no, good Mrs. Mary,’ answered Nelson, smiling. ‘Let the officer in at once. If he asks for me, show him in hither. I will answer him gladly and fearlessly. I have broken no law. I am ashamed of no man.’

‘What will he do?’ asked Tom, as the woman slowly withdrew; and he, it must be confessed, would mightily have enjoyed knocking down this emissary of the law.

‘Nay, I know not—bluster and swear, perchance, and talk great swelling words about prison, and the stocks, and so forth. I have been so threatened many times before, but save that once I was pressed for a soldier, and had hard work to get off from serving as such, no harm has ever come to me. The war is over, and men are not being carried off in that fashion now. And here comes our good friend the constable. Sure that is his tread in the passage without.’

‘Where is the preacher?’ asked a voice thick with drink, as the door of the room was burst open, and half a dozen men entered.

Nelson at once rose to his feet.

‘I am he, sir. What do you desire of me?’

‘You must come with me before the mayor.’

‘Where is your warrant?’

‘My staff is my warrant. Come, lads, help me; for I will make him come before the mayor.’

There was a rush amongst those behind, who came forward with many profane oaths, swearing and cursing, and plainly half drunk. Tom Heron set his teeth, and a dangerous light shone in his eyes; but Nelson’s restraining hand was on his arm. His voice rose above the tumult, and the other voices died into silence.

‘I am not afraid to go before the mayor, but it is your business, constable, to take up these disorderly and profane swearers. And if you do not do your duty it is in my power to make you pay a fine of forty shillings.’

But without heeding these words, which only incensed them more, the constable and his attendants hauled away the preacher; and as Tom refused to be parted from him, they roughly conducted them both through the streets of the town, followed by a hooting mob. It was Tom’s first experience of the kind, and he would dearly have liked to lay about him, and to clear a way for his master through the press. But he knew that this would be worse than useless; so he contented himself by walking onward, very erect and bold, showing plainly that he was not ashamed of the cause in which he was embarked.

As they neared the house of the mayor, they were stopped by a fine gentleman, who demanded whither they were going and what was the matter.

‘It is the mad Methodists, my lord,’ answered the constable obsequiously; ‘they have been preaching again without licence. I am taking them before the mayor.’

‘Don’t do that,’ said the fine young gentleman, with an oath; ‘for the mayor is their friend, and says he will put in the house of correction any one that disturbs them. Wherefore carry them instead before the Alderman H——; he will do for them.’

With that the constable quickly turned his prisoners round

and commenced marching them in another direction ; but Nelson stopped short and said,—

‘I insist on being taken before the mayor.’

‘But I will make you go where I please!’ bawled the constable, and the crowd responded with loud shouts.

‘You told me you would take me before the mayor,’ returned Nelson ; ‘you are in truth a strange officer of the law, for here are you encouraging swearing and disorder in others, and telling lies yourself. Is that how you perform your office?’

But the constable bawled out louder than ever, ‘Help us, good folks, to carry the Methodist preacher to the house of correction!’ while the mob, taking up the cry, raised such a tumult that Nelson’s voice could no longer be heard, and he and his companion were roughly hustled along till they came to the alderman’s house.

By this time there were several hundreds following and making a noise. The house was quite beset, and the two prisoners were pushed through the door into the presence of the master of the house.

This functionary came forward with a scowling face, ill-pleased at the tumult about his doors. On learning the cause, he turned angrily upon Nelson and his companion.

‘I wonder to see you here again. Why cannot you stay in your own place without going from town to town stirring up strife and riot? I should have thought by this time you would have been convinced that the mob of Nottingham will never let you preach here.’

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ answered Nelson quietly, ‘but I did not know before that Nottingham was governed by a mob ; for most such towns are governed by magistrates.’

The alderman’s colour rose at this, and he said impatiently,—

‘Tush, man ! Do you think that we will protect Wesley or any of his pack? I believe you have been the cause of all the rebellion and commotions in this land.’

‘Sir,’ answered Nelson, ‘can you prove that one amongst us ever favoured the Pretender?’

‘Well, it has always been observed that there was always such a preaching, brawling people before any judgment came upon the land.’

‘That is the goodness of God towards His people, in sending messengers to warn them to repent, that they may escape His judgments here and the torments of the damned hereafter. Sir, you may as well say that it was through Jeremiah that the Chaldeans destroyed Jerusalem, because he told them it would be so. No, it is not through praying and preaching that evil comes upon a land, but through swearing and cursing, drunkenness and debauchery; for oppressing the poor, and denying the Lord that bought us. These are the people that bring the sword and pestilence into the land.’

Here the constable, seeing that the alderman was silent, broke rudely in,—

‘Do you think we will take warning by such fellows as you?’

‘If you do not, you must feel the blow when God shall pour out His judgments upon the earth, as He will do shortly.’

‘Come, come, my good fellow! you must not preach here,’ said the alderman, waking out of his reverie; ‘yet I verily believe you are a good man, and I will not have you molested. Constable, see this man safe to his lodging. Mr. Nelson, I wish you well wherever you go.’

Tom and his leader shortly afterwards found themselves in the street, from which the crowd had melted. Tom looked with surprise into the face of the preacher; but he answered with a smile,—

‘It is so often the way; said I not that the Lord stood by us? “The fierceness of man will He restrain.” It is not by hard blows that we prevail—ever remember that, good Tom—but by the might of the Word which we proclaim. I am glad you have been with me this day, for you will see how it is that, though in perils oft, we so rarely come to hurt. “The Lord is about my path and about my bed, and spieth out all my ways.”’

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ITINERANT PREACHER.

‘**T**OM HERON, I verily believe the Lord has called thee to be a proclaimer of the gospel to others. Thou hast put thy hand to the plough: wilt thou be content now to turn back? Remember that we shall one day be called to account for every talent with which the Lord has entrusted us. If it shall be found that we have laid any of them up in a napkin, and have let them rust for want of use, we know that we shall be accounted unprofitable servants, and shall hear a terrible condemnation pronounced upon us.’

Tom listened to these words with downcast eyes and an irresolute mien. It was not the first time that John Nelson had so spoken to him; but he had always greatly shrunk from the thought of opening his lips and speaking of the thoughts in his heart. Occasionally he had ‘engaged in prayer,’ as it was termed, at some of the many prayer-meetings he attended with his master, as he loved to call Nelson; and in the class-meeting he had—when called upon to state his own experiences and temptations—done so in a fashion which had arrested attention, and proved him to be gifted with a rude, terse eloquence and originality of thought decidedly above the average. He had worked hand in hand with Nelson for nearly a year, and had shown himself a most valuable ally, both in the travelling and in organising work; but he had never shown any disposition to act independently, or to become one of the growing band of itinerant preachers, notwithstanding the fact that on

several occasions persons who had heard his history had made urgent request that 'Brother Heron' should address the company.

Tom still laboured under a painful sense of humiliation and inferiority. He still doubted the reality of his conversion; for after his last and worst lapse into sin he had had no instantaneous sense of revelation, pardon, and peace; and though his faith was growing daily in strength, and he was learning to resist temptation as he had never resisted it before, he still felt that there must be some great want in his spiritual condition; and his own friends were inclined to take the same view as he did of his state. At each revivalist service he attended he and they alike hoped that some special revelation would be made to him; but it never came. There were moments when some of the old depression would return, and he was disposed to look upon himself as a vessel of wrath. But his friends always cheered him with words of encouragement, and Mr. Wesley's own case was cited again and again, showing how much good a man might do for others, and how he might be a faithful preacher of the Word, before he had been himself assured of instantaneous salvation, and had lost all sense of the burden of sin.

Others held that as he had once experienced this sudden change, it was not necessary for him to do so a second time, even though he had in the meantime so deeply fallen. His case and his history attracted altogether a great deal of interest and attention, and Tom found himself by degrees a man of greater mark than he had ever thought or wished to be.

But this sense of unworthiness and inferiority made him very, very loth to be put forward in any way; and he had always resisted the suggestion made to him by others that he should see if he had not the gift of utterance. He was quite certain that he had not, and did not even desire it; but a day came when, through force of circumstances, he was forced to make trial of such powers as he had.

Nelson had promised to preach to a colony of rough miners in a certain place in Derbyshire, and Tom was to meet him there at the appointed time to assist in conducting the service. Tom had arrived at the place true to the minute, but, to his great surprise, Nelson did not turn up. Besides the miners, eager to hear the Word, were a number of idle mockers ready to jeer and gibe and scoff, to whom the non-appearance of the preacher gave a pretext for declaring that he stayed away because he had nothing to say; that the Methodists were all dumb dogs, and that their doctrine was false and empty.

Tom's hot blood was easily stirred within him. As these words fell upon his ears he felt himself tingling from head to foot, and after waiting patiently a full half-hour, he felt he could stand it no longer. Nelson had plainly been detained in some very unusual way, and unless the people were to go away unfed, whilst cause was thus given to the enemy to blaspheme, he, and he alone, must strive to feed them; and with the sense of urgent necessity came also the sense of power and inspiration. Calmly stepping upon the little platform of stones that had been erected for the use of the preacher, he told the people that in the enforced absence of his master he would try, however imperfectly, to fill his place; and opening his Bible at haphazard, and lighting upon the words, 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?' he launched suddenly and abruptly into his first sermon, and preached to a breathless audience the story of the Man of Sorrows, bringing home to each individual present so strong a sense of his own individual share in the sufferings of the Saviour that strong men wept aloud, and those who had come to scoff stood transfixed in shamefaced silence.

So earnest, so impassioned, so absorbed did Tom become, that the quiet approach of his master during the course of his sermon passed unnoticed and unknown. Nelson made no attempt to declare himself, but took a place in the outskirts of the crowd, where Tom would be least likely to see

him ; and only when the discourse had ended, and the crowd had melted away, did he show himself to his confused and astonished pupil, when, taking him by the hand, he gave him solemn warning and counsel not to let a gift such as the Lord had given him rest unused and unknown, when it might be the means of turning many souls to salvation.

The sense of an unexpected power brings with it the natural desire to use that power. Tom was taken out of himself by the discovery of an unsuspected gift, and no longer held back with shrinking and dread. If the Master had called him, and had given him a message to utter in His Name, he knew he must not hang back. He returned to his present quarters very thoughtful and grave, but no longer rebellious ; and when the story of his unprepared discourse was told to the little society in which he was for the time being located, he made no remonstrance when it was decided that he should go out into the world to proclaim the gospel wherever he could gain a hearing.

Hitherto he had plied his own trade diligently during the greater part of the week, only attending John Nelson on Sundays and upon such occasions as it was desired of him. He often changed his locality, as his master moved constantly from place to place ; but a good blacksmith never found any difficulty in getting employment, wherever he might be, while Nelson himself often worked at his stone-cutting by day, giving his evenings to prayer and class-meetings, and his Sundays to preaching wherever he could find listeners.

Now, however, a new life was to commence for Tom. He still had the good horse Mrs. Mary had given him from the Ernscliff stables, and he was sent forth with but little money in his purse, to wander through the wilder districts of Yorkshire and the north, trusting to the piety and good-will of those amongst whom he laboured for food and shelter, or, if need be, obtaining work from time to time in order to supply his modest necessities. The spring was quickly coming. During the next months the life of the itinerant

preacher would be far from disagreeable. Tom set out upon his mission with a brave heart and steadfast courage, marveling that he should have been honoured thus to proclaim his Lord's name—he, the chief of sinners, as he always felt himself to be—but humbled rather than puffed up by the belief in his call, and steadfastly resolved to do his duty faithfully and unflinchingly, even to the death. Although the perils of the Methodist preacher were on the whole declining as men grew used to them, and the dread of Papist Jacobites abated in the country, still there were hardships and perils enough to be encountered; and it was perhaps not strange to one of Tom's ardent and sensitive temperament that he should sometimes almost wish that he might be called upon to lay down his life for his Lord; should feel that to be found at his post, doing the Master's work, and working or fighting in the Master's cause, would be the happiest thing for himself, and perhaps the safest too.

But physical perils did not seem likely to come in Tom's way at present. Wild as were the districts he visited, long and solitary as were the rides he took across trackless wastes of moorland and fell, he was not molested by any of the half-wild inhabitants of the tiny hamlets, or attacked by the highwaymen who were the terror of the wealthier travellers of those days.

On the contrary, the people he visited appeared to be eager to hear him. Tom was a Yorkshireman born and bred, and in old days had done much wandering about the fells and dales of his native county. He knew the strange dialects spoken there; and he was in sympathy with the ignorant and almost heathen folks he often met.

With tribes of wandering gipsies he could establish a bond of union at once, and he seldom met the smallest opposition in proclaiming the message of salvation. The more ignorant and untaught the people, the more ready they appeared to be to hear him. Some of them seemed to be little better than heathens when first he appeared amongst them, and if they

had heard of God, they only knew Him as a name. Of the love of Christ the Redeemer they had never heard.

In some of these remoter places up in the fells the people, though rude and wild, were susceptible to impression, and when the story of His love was told them in homely and comprehensible words, many eagerly crowded round the preacher to hear more, and seemed to take home to their hearts the Divine lesson.

It was far easier for Tom to be the first pioneer of the gospel than to deal with men who, having heard and in part received it, were distracted by controversy or torn by internal dissensions. He had seen only too much of this latter phase in the larger towns where Nelson's work lay ; and it was a marvellous relief to be quit of it, and to address himself to men and women who only strove to grasp at the elementary and primary truths of Christianity, and who accepted his teaching in the childlike spirit of the unlettered and ignorant.

The worst that he met with in these wilder regions was stolid indifference and hopeless lethargy. There were places where he spoke as if to deaf ears, where no impression seemed to be made upon any single soul ; but of active opposition he met but little, and of organised resistance none. Idlers would sometimes come round him to gape and stare and make mouths ; but there was no stone-throwing, no ducking in horse-ponds, no dragging before magistrates or local authorities.

For one thing, to be sure, the local authorities were generally strangers to the places and people he sought, and if there were a parson within reach, it was not often that he offered any open remonstrance to these evangelical efforts amongst his flock. For the most part, the remoter districts where churches existed were only served by ill-paid curates, who attended occasionally on Sunday, but paid no heed whatever to their flock at other times. In most cases they lived far away from the place they nominally cared for, and

eked out a scanty livelihood by teaching or doing pen-work for some of the larger land-owners.

Tom Heron had learned his lesson of toleration, and did not go about, as too many of the itinerant preachers did, abusing the clergy to their parishioners, and descanting on their carelessness or ignorance in scathing terms, whilst at the same time demanding their pulpits, in order the better to show up their failings to their flock. Such mistaken men were but too common, and it was in a great measure their indiscriminate vehemence that raised hatred and opposition to Methodism amongst the clergy of the land. There were undoubtedly grave faults on both sides—faults which in the end led to formal schism; but in Tom Heron's day it was fondly believed by many that this schism would be avoided; and he, having learnt the lesson of toleration and good-will, was careful to do nothing to raise, in the minds of those to whom he spoke, the idea that the Church of Christ was rent in twain by hostile factions.

It was a happy summer, on the whole, for Tom Heron; and the results, if nothing very wonderful, were sufficient to fill him with hope for the future. He felt that a special work had been given him to do, and he was resolved to do it with his might. His untiring energy and zeal, and determination not to spare himself, induced him to prosecute his long rough journeys regardless of fatigue or exposure, with the result that in crossing a swollen stream on horseback once he was drenched to the skin, and after riding for many hours in wet clothes, and then preaching in them in a cold north wind, he took a chill, which brought on a sharp attack of his old enemy the rheumatism.

It was an awkward thing for Tom to find himself next morning in a little wayside cottage (tenanted by a shepherd and his old mother), hardly able to move hand or foot, and utterly incapable of pursuing his journey. The good people who had listened to his discourse the previous evening, and had offered him a night's shelter, were too poor to desire to

have a sick man left on their hands, and too solicitous for his well-being not to wish him to move into more comfortable quarters. But up here in the hills it was no easy matter to know what was to be done. The few neighbours occupying cottages in the hollow below were as poor and as ill-lodged as the shepherd himself. The news that the preacher was 'tuk bad' spread quickly to the hamlet, and the inhabitants mustered together to discuss the matter in full conclave; but Tom, who could hear through the window most of the discussion, did not gather that any of them had any very bright suggestions to offer. The farmer for whom they all worked was plainly not the kind of man likely to take in a travelling preacher, and after his merits had been openly discussed, and the hope of his hospitality finally rejected, there was a long pause, which was broken by a woman's voice saying, tentatively and timidly,—

'There be Muster Annesley for sure; he be a good man and a kind one. Maybe he'd take un in.'

'It's a matter o' six miles off, and he be a parson. Some folks say as parsons don't take kind to preachers.'

This hamlet was not very many miles from more populous regions, and therefore something of the spirit of the day had permeated to its inhabitants. After this objection had been made, there came a pause of silence; and though the discussion appeared to be recommenced by-and-by, the speakers had moved away farther off, and Tom could not hear how the matter ended.

Nothing was said to him. He lay all day upon the hard pallet bed, of which towards noon he grew so unutterably weary that he contrived, though at the cost of much pain and difficulty, to drag himself up and creep into his clothes, which had been well dried by the fire. He had not long accomplished this task before the sound of wheels made itself heard without, and the wheels stopped at the door of the cabin.

Next moment the latch was lifted, and in walked a very

venerable old man, whose silver hair was tied back by a black ribbon, whilst the long black coat and knee breeches, and the full white cravat, showed that he belonged to the clerical calling. He walked slowly, as if somewhat infirm, and Tom involuntarily rose at sight of him. The mild old face was full of benevolence, and by no means lacking in intellectual power. The clergyman removed his hat as he stepped across the threshold, and extending his hand to Tom, said kindly,—

‘I am glad to see you so far restored, sir; but I can see that you are still unfit for any travelling on horseback. Indeed, you would recover faster if you would take to your bed for a few days. I know what rheumatism is; we in these cold latitudes suffer much from it in the winter months. Still, I am glad to see you up just now, for I have come to fetch you in my chaise, and as the day threatens rain, the sooner we are under the safe shelter of my roof the better for us both.’

Tom was greatly surprised at the cordiality of this address from a man of a social position so much superior to his own; but something in the calm authority of the old man, and the kindly way in which he issued his orders, robbed Tom of any power or wish to make excuse. He very soon found himself seated in the chaise beside the old clergyman, and after nearly two hours of rough travelling, which gave little scope or wish for conversation, he found himself entering the low doorway of a very quaint old house, surrounded by a trim and exquisitely kept garden, after which he was shown into a dark, oak-panelled bed-room, and for the first time in his life found himself lying in a great canopied four-post bedstead, whilst a bright fire blazed upon the hearth.

For three days Tom was forced to keep to his bed, being powerless to rise. His host visited him several times every day; and though he did not talk much, Tom grew to feel towards him that sense of veneration and intimacy which is the truest test of instinctive sympathy of mind. From the

housekeeper he learned that Master Annesley, as he always seemed to be called, lived quite alone, having long ago buried his wife and two children within a year of each other, living now for the flock of his small but scattered parish, and making of it a little oasis in the surrounding desert of neglect and vice.

The more he heard of his host the more drawn was Tom towards him; and when upon the fourth evening of his stay he managed to dress himself and crawl down to the study, he was more than ready, when asked to do so, to pour out his whole story into the sympathetic ears of the aged clergyman; and long and interesting was the talk that followed respecting the recent revival of religious faith and Mr. Wesley's share in it.

Upon another occasion Tom spoke even more fully, and told his new friend all the trouble that was in his heart respecting his own state—his misgivings lest he were not truly converted, and his fear lest, after having preached to others, he himself might prove a castaway.

He was listened to with profound attention, a smile stealing over the face of the old man as he heard those concluding words.

'My dear young friend,' he said as Tom ceased, 'you have, if you but knew it, answered your own objection yourself. Who was it that held that same fear? Was it not St. Paul himself? And if there ever was a case on record of instantaneous conversion, was it not his own? Did he feel himself any the safer because his conversion had been miraculous and instantaneous? It appears to me not. He had the same fear that every earnest Christian must have—knowing the evil of the human heart and the power of the devil—that he might fall away and lose the grace of God. So long as we remain in the bonds of the flesh, we are none of us exempt from the danger of falling under the power of Satan, however high has been, or has seemed to be, our state before. Faith in Christ's atoning

blood gives us constant assurance of constant forgiveness, so long as we keep close to Him ; but that we may ever in this life be freed from fear of sin, or absolutely assured of salvation, can never be ; for so long as we remain in the frailty of the flesh, so long is there the possibility that we may fall away. If St. Paul felt this, how can we look to have a fuller assurance ? Would it not be a snare and a peril if we had it ?'

Tom was silent, but he looked relieved. Presently he said slowly,—

'I have heard men speak as though they believed that they did live and could live in a state of sinless perfection, but I have never felt it myself.'

'Nor I,' answered the old man, with a sweet smile. 'Indeed, I scarce see how we, with our eyes fixed upon the spotless Lamb of God, the only Man who ever did live a sinless life on earth, can feel in regard to our own lives that they have attained any perfection. The very force of contrast will make even our holiest actions dark by comparison, though we know that in His atoning blood our souls are ever being washed white. Still, there must ever be with us, I think, the same feeling that was with St. Paul—"Not as though I had already attained." At least, it is so I myself read the Scripture—it is so that I think and feel, though God forbid that I should judge another.'

'That is how I feel,' answered Tom, with subdued vehemence ; 'but I have feared it was because I was not truly converted.'

'Say not that, my son,' said the old man ; 'for every man is truly converted who truly turns from the error of his ways and the filth of the flesh, and turns his face God-ward once again.'

'But have I done so ? I do not know—I had not instantaneous sense of pardon and peace.'

'My good friend, try and answer that question yourself. When you did have that quick and powerful illumination,

was it the forerunner of a truer conversion than this later one, where it was not vouchsafed? You have told me much of yourself—more, perhaps, than you know. Which conversion has been the more blessed to you?—the first, when, after turning from all your fellow-men and striving to live shut up with your hopes and aspirations, you fell once more into the old ways? or this second turning to God, when there has been a steady growth in grace—a slow but growing faith in Christ's love and atoning salvation, a submissive response to the call of God, and a yielding up your own will to that which has seemed to be His?'

Tom was silent, but there was a new light in his face.

'Think, my young friend, think of the slow growth of grace and knowledge in the hearts of the first apostles. Christ was actually with them in the flesh, but did He convert them instantaneously? How and when were these words spoken to one of their number, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" Was it not at the very close of His earthly ministry? And was He not that very night forsaken by all—betrayed by one—denied by another of those selected twelve? And are we to think that if this was the way our blessed Lord worked when He was here amongst us—slowly, gradually, gently leading His followers to Himself and a true and firm faith, that we are to look in these days, and in every individual case, for a semi-supernatural change, and an instantaneous revelation of Himself? I trow not. "Line upon line, precept upon precept: here a little, and there a little"—that has been God's way in His dealings with men from the beginning of the world, and I believe will be His way to the end. Yet do not mistake me. Do not think that I disbelieve or despise sudden conversion—sudden repentance. We have before our eyes the dying thief for the one, the Apostle Paul for the other. Let no man judge, let no man condemn; but you, my young friend, who see much of these so-called instantaneous conversions,

be very patient and gentle with those who claim to receive this light, and discourage them not if afterwards they seem to fall away and lose it. The growth of the soul, like the growth of the body, is slow. We cannot attain holiness or perfection at once ; we cannot even keep fast hold upon the saving grace without hard and ceaseless struggle. It is human nature to think that we shall always retain what we have grasped ; it is equally human frailty that we find we cannot hold fast any high or holy thing without a constant and a fierce strife. Let all your converts know this, and deal very gently with their backslidings. As for yourself, do not covet that sudden and miraculous illumination of soul ; be content to be led by slow and gradual steps, as were the blessed apostles themselves, until the day come when the clouds shall all roll away, and the Saviour shall reveal Himself as He did to the doubter, and you shall say with him in perfect faith and trust, "My Lord and my God."

'Thank you, sir,' said Tom, drawing a long breath ; and he went to his room that night strangely comforted.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLD FACES IN NEW PLACES.

TOM spent a fortnight in the house of Master Annesley with great pleasure and profit. Refinement and cultivation of mind were by no means lost upon the young blacksmith, who had generally met the deepest religious convictions in men as rough and uncultured as himself—men who knew not how to clothe their thoughts in appropriate words, and were generally forced, as he was himself, to fall back upon Bible phraseology, which gradually became so stereotyped in their conversation as to lose something of its freshness and beauty, and even the significance with which, in the beginning, it had seemed charged.

Master Annesley put into words of his own the innermost thoughts of Tom's heart—thoughts of which he was hardly himself aware, till he was startled by hearing them reproduced by his host in fresh and beautifully appropriate words. His mind seemed to expand, and his soul to drink in great draughts of refreshment every hour of the day. Time flew by as if on wings, and it was with a start of surprise that the young man discovered that he had been two whole weeks beneath the shelter of this hospitable roof.

'You have been very kind to me, sir,' he said, when this thought recalled him to the recollection of his own duties, 'but I must not tarry longer. The winter is well nigh upon us, and I must be up and doing. There is work enough and to spare.'

'Your time has not been wasted, my young friend; the

body needs rest, and the mind likewise, and you are only just fit for the saddle again. But tell me now—what do you purpose to do these next inclement months? See, the tops of the hills are already white with snow. In a few more weeks we may look to be more or less weather-bound in our lonely moorland homes. You cannot continue your roving life then. What will you do when the winter comes?’

‘I had not thought of changing my ways,’ answered Tom. ‘Other men have travelled summer and winter, and why not I?’

‘Your enemy the rheumatism will soon answer that question for you, my friend, if you persist in tempting him back,’ answered Master Annesley, smiling; ‘whatever other men may be able to do—whatever you yourself may find yourself able to accomplish in years to come, when you may have got the better of that bad illness which nearly cost you your life two years ago, it is very plain that for this winter at least you must exercise care and prudence. If you take the advice of an old man, you will just go home and rest quietly there till the spring comes, and you can travel about once more.’

But Tom shook his head and looked troubled.

‘I cannot go back to Sax—I dare not,’ he answered in low tones; ‘I did so before, and I fell back into sin. It might be so again. I dare not trust myself.’

‘Good; in that will lie your great safeguard. Perhaps the last time you did trust yourself and your “new religion” to keep you from all temptation.’

‘I believe I did,’ answered Tom, humbly enough. ‘I can see now how many mistakes I made, and how self-righteous I was. But, apart from that, I do not wish to go to Sax. There is no work for me to do there. Mr. Wesley himself in passing through would not preach to the people. He told them that there was no message he had for them which they could not and did not hear from their own clergyman. It is to the lost sheep we are sent—to the sheep who have

no shepherd. I must do my Master's work, and it does not seem to me that He has anything for me to do in Sax.'

Master Annesley smiled as he answered,—

'Well, well, my dear lad, I never myself found the place where the Lord's work might not be done; but each man must judge for himself. At least, the world is wide, and in large cities there are always perishing souls to be found by hundreds, ay, and thousands. Go, then, to some great town for these winter months—go to York, since you have friends there; and whilst you are trying to save the souls of the ignorant multitude, you can take such reasonable care of your own body as prudence and common-sense demand.'

But Tom's face was still troubled and perplexed.

'I cannot bear towns,' he said; 'I have been in them before, and there is always the same thing everywhere.'

'What thing?'

'Contention and strife and disputing!' cried Tom, speaking quickly and vehemently; 'and it makes my heart sick to hear it;' and forthwith he poured into sympathetic ears the story of his own troubles with regard to the irreconcilable split in his own party, together with his hatred of controversial strife, and his misgivings that there were discrepancies to be found in the Scriptures.

Master Annesley listened with his thoughtful smile, and then he said to Tom,—

'My dear lad, the same Holy Spirit dictated the whole of that sacred Book, and though I have studied it closely these many years, I have never felt any misgivings such as trouble you. Take yon Bible in your hands and let us for a moment discuss these troublous passages, and see if we cannot find some way of reconciling them one with another.'

Tom eagerly took the sacred Book and opened to a certain place. Master Annesley looked over his shoulder and smiled as he saw the words.

'Ah, that passage from St. Jude, "Men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation." If,

my young friend, you had asked Mr. Wesley the true meaning of those words, he, as a scholar of the original tongue, would have told you—what any scholar will tell you—namely, that the real significance of the passage in the original is that there had been words of prophecy spoken of old, that such men as these should trouble the Church in the later days. That God has ever fore-ordained any man to eternal damnation is a thought adverse to the whole of the Biblical teaching from the very beginning of its history.'

Tom was eagerly turning the leaves of his Bible, and pointed out the much-disputed passage in the Epistle to the Romans, at which Master Annesley did not even need to look. The smile deepened on his face. He quietly recited the following words, very slowly and impressively, "'For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate,"—predestinate to what?—let us see; and observe, my young friend, that the words go straight on without any stop, and read thus, "He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." Now, Tom Heron, if you quietly and seriously study those words, I think you will see that whatever else the election of God may mean, it means this above all else—to be conformed to the image of God's Son—to be Christ-like in word and in deed. We must strive in all things to be like Him, not asking, "Am I elected?" but, "Am I striving to be conformed to the image of the Son of God?"'

Tom's eyes were fixed earnestly on the speaker; and Master Annesley continued with a thoughtful smile,—

'And we must not ask this selfishly; we must think not alone of the salvation of our own souls, but of acting as God's firstborn to our brethren around.'

'How?' asked Tom almost under his breath.

The clergyman smiled slightly,—

'Ah, Tom Heron, I am not sure that I can answer that question, for God acts in His own way, and we do not

always know what that way is ; but of one thing we may be very sure, namely, that of us Christian people—baptised into the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ—some work will here or hereafter be demanded. The doctrine of election, as it seems to me, after careful study of the Scriptures, carries with it always this idea—that some are called or chosen for the blessing of others. We see this principle running throughout God's dealings with man from the very creation. Seth and his descendants were chosen above sinful Cain's (though he, and not his sons, had sinned), yet Cain's descendants were to be blessed through the Promised Seed. Abraham was called of God, not for himself alone, but that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed. The Jews were a chosen people set to be a light to the nations around (had they but lived up to their high calling), and through them came the Messiah into the world—the Light to lighten the Gentiles. Like a golden thread running through Holy Writ is this thought—that God calls out some for the blessing of the rest—that He elects, as it were, His firstborn, but looks to them to enlighten and bless their brethren. It is for us Christians to ask, "Are we doing our part in this God-given work? We are called after the name of Christ; are we conforming ourselves to His image—not merely to obtain our own salvation, but to strive to be a blessing to our brethren?"

Tom's face was gravely bright.

'I think I follow you there, sir; but what of the elect and their falling away? Can they fall away?'

Master Annesley made a gesture that arrested Tom's farther words.

'With that, my friend, we have nothing to do. Who are ye to judge another man's servants? to their own master they stand or fall. How much more true is this of the servants of God! He alone is Judge. St. Peter bids us make our calling and election sure; and for myself I can only see one meaning to that injunction, which is that we

stand or fall—live or die—according as we accept the great Atonement and conform ourselves to the image of the Son of God. But, my dear young friend, avoid controversy wherever it is possible. Try to see in all men brothers and fellow-workers in the vineyard of the Lord. Be sure of your own ground ; when questions savouring of doubt arise, seek out godly men who may help to explain away the difficulty and enable you, if the occasion arise, to help men in like difficulties ; but do not rush eagerly into controversy and strife. Remember that men are almost never convinced against their will by argument—least of all in matters of religion. Do not be afraid to go amongst your brethren, but avoid contention as far as it may be possible.'

The end of all this was that November saw Tom back in the city of York, occupying a humble lodging in the house of Brother Holdsworthy, labouring heart and soul amongst the poor and ignorant and degraded population within the walls, and finding that he possessed powers both of preaching and exhortation above any that he had asked or hoped.

York was of course a military town, and there came in due course a request from some of the soldiers that Tom Heron might come and address them at a certain place at a certain time. The officers were in the main averse to Methodist influence in the ranks ; but the present colonel was a man of high principle and wide toleration. He had condemned the opposition made by the younger officers, and had said that he would permit a preaching to be given in the barrack-yard at a certain time on Sunday afternoon.

Tom was very willing to respond to the invitation received. He had got over his first shyness at preaching. His natural gift of rude eloquence had been developed and trained, and practice had given him confidence. He was especially successful in addressing himself to men, and the rougher his audience the more successful he often proved. Soldiers were for the most part rude enough and ignorant enough.

He had seen enough of their ways during the past weeks' residence in the town to be well aware of that. The swearing, the drinking, the immorality amongst them was fearful to witness. Tom, who always thought carefully over any address before he delivered it, had no intention of sparing his listeners. It was not the fashion of his teachers to mince matters—the hideousness of sin and the terrible retribution which it called down upon its devotees was a favourite theme with the Methodist preacher, and Tom remembered too well the blackness of his own degradation to attempt to palliate vice in any form whatever.

His tall muscular figure, his handsome striking face, now refined by thought and suffering, and stamped with the unmistakable impress of lofty purpose, his clear ringing voice, the flash of his dark eyes, all helped to make his words doubly impressive, whilst something of the unusual history attaching to the man always gave an additional interest to his words.

It was well known that Tom Heron had led a life of wild and unbridled licence in his youth. He had not been ordinarily, but extraordinarily wild and reckless, and he was never backward in proclaiming the fact. It was useless for any one to urge that he was too far gone in sin to be saved. Tom would unfold to him the darker pages of his own history, and ask if his companion could match them.

'If Christ can't save you, then you are stronger than Christ,' he would urge; 'and if you are stronger than Christ, then Christ is not God, and we are all lost creatures together. If you don't want to break off your sins, if you don't want to be a sharer in His most precious Atonement, say so straight out like a man. The devil is close by, waiting to carry you away. But don't delude yourself by thinking that you want to be saved, that you want to have your sins washed away, but that you are so wicked that Christ can't or won't save you; because that only shows that in your heart of hearts you don't trust Him, and perhaps you don't

even want to trust Him. It's the work of the devil there at your elbow, making you think you are kept away by a sense of unworthiness, when all the while he is luring you farther and farther away from the Cross, which is your only hope. I have been through it all. I know what it is like. But with Christ there is plenteous redemption. If He died for the sins of the whole world, surely He is strong enough to save you.'

So Tom spoke to-day amongst the soldiers, who pressed around him afterwards to ask his help and tell of personal difficulties.

He had spent more than an hour in this way, and was about to leave the place, when he felt himself taken by the arm, and turned round quickly to find himself face to face with Jos Dawson and Michael Portway, both dressed in the garb of soldiers.

'Jos, Mike !' he cried, wringing them by the hand, 'how did you come here ? and in that guise too ?'

'We have been soldiers this past three months,' answered Mike, 'and we were resolved to hear thee preach, Tom, and set the fellows on to ask ; but we wouldn't let thee see us till thee had done. Man, what a gift thee hast ! I wish Mr. Latham could have heard thee. Thee know that he is dead ? Had thee not heard ? He died in September. And after that we could not bear Sax ; thee had gone, and then he was taken, and so we went for soldiers, and we are in Captain Fortescue's company, and are quartered here. Folks say that the ministers in Lunnon are going to have the army reduced, and perhaps we may be sent home before very long. But it's good to see thy face again, Tom Heron. Who would have thought in old days that thee'd turn preacher ?'

It was a great delight to Tom to see the familiar faces of his old friends, and to hear all the news of Sax. Molly, he was told, was growing up into quite a pretty maiden, so helpful and handy that it was hard to believe she was blind. She was still at Ernscliff, in some capacity, waiting on Mrs.

Mary, it was believed. Tom could hardly believe that the little one was nearly sixteen, she had always been so small and stunted and childlike. But years had sped by, and she had shot from childhood into maidenhood, and Jos Dawson declared that his mother, who took a deal of notice of her now, was fond of saying that she was a handier lass and a quieter and better-behaved one than half the girls with eyes in their heads. It was plain that Jos felt an honest liking for Molly, and he spoke of her with pride and satisfaction.

Tom saw as much of his old comrades during the next weeks as his duties would allow, and as these latter had been under the influence of religion for some time, and had serious views of life and its responsibilities, there was much to draw them together. They came to Tom for advice and assistance in their difficulties and temptations, and it was a keen pleasure to him to learn that to him and his conversion, and the impression it produced upon them both, these men dated the beginning of a striving after better things themselves. Tom had hitherto looked back to his life in Sax as the most wretched and unprofitable part of his existence; to find that it had been of service to others there, was a source of unspeakable joy to him.

Christmas had come and gone, the new year had commenced, when his friends once more sought him out with faces full of consternation.

Jos and Mike were both about to return to Sax. The fiat had gone forth that some companies were to be disbanded. The country had more soldiers than it required, and economy demanded an abatement. The two recruits were not altogether sorry to hear that they were to return home. They had not found the life in barracks as much to their liking as they had hoped. Now that they had grown used to the blank at home, Sax might be pleasant to them again. The good time of the year was coming round. Jos knew his parents would welcome him back, and it was not on account

of the approaching separation from Tom that their faces looked so full of dismay.

Hastily taking him apart into his own small sleeping-chamber, they poured into his ears a tale which sounded wild and improbable enough, but which in those days of highway robbery and lawlessness might prove too true, and it excited Tom's profound indignation.

Jos and Mike had learned the details of the proposed plan from the body-servant of their captain. Young Fortescue, who had fallen into debt, and was in desperate straits for money, had resolved that at all costs he would force himself upon Mary Ernscliff as a husband. He had been wooing her for years, but not with real ardour, as it was her money, not herself, he really cared for, and she had always received his advances with such marked coldness that he had never been able to come to the point. Now, however, his mind was made up, and as he knew that his chances were small if he wooed in the ordinary way, he was resolved to try and win her by a bold ruse, and if that failed to exercise a certain amount of force.

It had come to his knowledge, through his sister, that Mrs. Mary was forced to take a winter's journey to visit the property just over the Scotch border, which had passed into her hands a year or two ago. Mrs. Ernscliff would of course not be able to be with her, and she would only have servants in attendance. The captain's plan was to disguise a certain number of trusty fellows as highwaymen, to make them attack the carriage, make prisoners of the servants, and carry them and their lady to a small wayside cottage, deserted and empty, where they would believe themselves in actual peril of their lives. Then he, the captain, would effect a rescue, apparently at the peril of his life, and he reckoned that in the gratitude of the moment the lady would listen to his impassioned pleading, and surrender herself to him; or if not, that he could contrive to accompany her across the border, and force her into one of the all-too-easy Scotch

marriages, which were the terror of guardians and the peril of maidens in those days.

Tom listened to the details of this plan in silence, whilst the veins on his forehead swelled with the old anger that was still ready to boil up within him. At the close of the story he was silent a moment, and then between clenched teeth he said,—

‘It shall be my part to put a stop to this vile plot; and you lads will help me to do it.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WINTER JOURNEY.

‘I DO not like winter travelling, my dear, but if it is your duty I must not withhold you,’ said Mrs. Ernscliff; ‘there seems real need for your presence at Bantock, I cannot deny that.’

‘Yes, I think I must go,’ answered Mary, ‘if only for a few days. After all, the journey is not a very long one, and it is a frequented road. I shall post the whole way. And I am hardy—I am not afraid of cold.’

‘Would it not be better to travel with your own horses and servants all the way, my dear? It is so much more comfortable.’

‘I will have one or two servants, certainly, but I think not the horses, or any number of attendants. I shall push on faster if I post. I will have our own carriage, of course, and then Peter and Jacob can go behind. Oh, I shall be quite safe and comfortable.’

‘I trust so, my dear; but you will take a maid also?’

‘I hardly know whom to choose. Anne is so young and so timid. She would think she saw a highwayman in every tree or horseman along the road; whilst as for good old Dinah, it would be cruel to take her away from the fireside in the midst of the frost and snow.’

‘There is Molly,’ said Mrs. Ernscliff; ‘but she would not be much help in a strange house, and she is very young.’

‘Molly would at least not be scared by terrors along the

road,' answered Mary, smiling; 'I would rather have her than Anne. But I will think about it, and see what can be done. I am just going to walk up to Sheepwold Farm to see Janet. She knows that part of the country, and will be able to tell me something about the best road.'

Janet was considered quite an authority in matters of travel, for since her marriage with Farmer Dawson she had paid several visits to her native country, and had the reputation therefore of an experienced traveller. Mrs. Mary was a rare favourite with Janet. She was one of the few beings in the world whom that stern woman looked upon with real affection, respect, and admiration. She was always proud to welcome the lady of Ernscliff beneath her roof, and when appealed to for information about the roads, gave it clearly and intelligently.

'But I no like your travelling alone, mem,' said Janet, as she by-and-by heard more of the details of the proposed journey; 'and the puir blind lassie, for all she is such a guid lassie, will be no manner of service upon the road. Them posting-houses are no the places for a leddy like you to bide in, not without you had your own woman to look after you there. I ken the ways of them as we go north; they be rarely rough and oncomfortable.'

'Well, it will not be for long I shall trouble any of them,' answered Mary, smiling; 'and I can put up with a little discomfort, if I have to meet it.'

Janet was musing, following some train of thought of her own; after a moment's silence she broke out,—

'I reckon, mem, that you had better tak' me with ye for a maid. I be no lassie to be skeered with robbers, and I ken the ways of the road and some of the houses we must put up at, and I reckon I could make ye more comfortable than a bit lassie like Anne, or a blind one like Molly. I'd tak' it as an honour if I might gang wi' ye, mem, and I dinna think we shall fall oot by the way. I'd be proud to serve ye ony way I could, and gin ye be ganging to my ain country I think ye could na do better than tak' me wi' ye.'

It was Janet's way to relapse into her native dialect when thinking of her own land, or when very much in earnest. Mary's smile was bright and sweet.

'I should be delighted to have you, Janet, and most grateful for your attendance, but what will your husband say? Can you be spared from home?'

'Oh ay, the guid man will na objec'. He'll be proud to think I can serve ye, mem. As for the hoose, Meg can luik after that the while. She be a steadier lassie sin' Mike went for a soldier. She promised him then to wed him when he came back. So she does na care to rin after the laddies as she did. She is content to bide at hame.'

Mary was very glad to have secured Janet's company for the journey, and Mrs. Ernscliff was even more relieved and pleased. Mary had hardly ever left home, and on the one occasion when she had visited Bantock, it had been in the height of the summer, and she had had company upon the road the whole way.

With Janet, however, to look after her during the journey, and to see to her comfort during the few days she would remain at Bantock, there was no fear that she would be anything but properly served. Of the dangers of the road itself Mary made light. Living as these ladies did, a very secluded and isolated life, they knew little the frequency with which travellers were attacked, and Mary had the high courage which often accompanies a highly strung temperament. She took with her two men-servants as well as Janet, and these former were possessed of fire-arms. Postillions always rode with pistols in their belts, and Mary was not travelling with any valuables in her possession. The plain carriage and its soberly dressed occupants, with their small and modest baggage, would scarcely be likely to be ranked as a prize by freebooters.

The weather was bitterly cold. Deep snow lay upon the ground, but the hard frost made travelling comparatively easy, and along all beaten roads the carriage travelled with

sufficient rapidity to satisfy the travellers of those unexact days.

One night had been spent at a wayside posting-house, whose accommodation had exceeded Mary's expectations. She had hoped by an early start to reach Bantock the next night ; but the roads grew increasingly bad as they proceeded northwards, and the steeper slopes retarded the progress of the carriage. At one posting station they were detained some considerable time before they could obtain fresh horses ; and dusk began to fall whilst they knew that they must be still very many miles from their journey's end.

Janet was beginning to feel just a little uncomfortable. She was a shrewd, sharp woman, and a keen observer of faces, and she had been rendered somewhat uncomfortable by certain things she had seen and heard at this last posting-house, where this delay had occurred. She was morally certain, in the first place, that their arrival had been expected ; how, she could not have said, it was an instinct, not a conclusion deduced from reasoning, yet she knew that no knowledge of their movements had preceded them hitherto. She had a feeling all the while that there was some purpose to be served by this delay in the providing of horses, and she had suggested more than once to her young mistress that they had better remain the night where they were, and proceed on their journey on the morrow, when they would have the day before them. But there seemed many objections to this plan. The posting-house was a very poor one, and none too clean. The landlord plainly did not wish to have to accommodate the party for the night. The sky looked charged with snow, and it seemed probable that unless they pushed on they might be detained some days in this miserable spot ; and Mary Ernscliff, though far from nervous or fanciful, sufficiently disliked and distrusted the faces of those about her to be wishful to get away from the place as quickly as possible.

Janet, too, was by no means certain that to move on

would not be the best plan, and as the suggestion about remaining had been followed suspiciously fast by the appearance of the missing post-horses, and as the postillions declared that they could easily reach Bantock before dark, it was a relief to all the party to be on the road once more, though a few flakes of snow had begun to fall, and the character of the track they were following decidedly belied the character that had been given to it by the post-boys.

The horses toiled along very slowly. They had trotted bravely for the first two or three miles; but now they were out in the midst of wild and snow-covered moors, and it seemed as though they were already wearied out. They crawled slowly along the white road, their drivers making little attempt to urge them on; already the winter twilight was upon them, and soon it would be dark, for though there was a full moon, the heavy snow-clouds threatened to block it out from view altogether.

Janet, now thoroughly uncomfortable both at the manner of the postillions and the peril of being benighted on the moors in a snow-storm, leaned forward and looked out of the window, from which she hastily rubbed the coating of ice. She fancied that she had seen some sort of signal made by the post-boy on the leading horse, and sure enough, no sooner had she looked out, than she saw a band of six or eight men riding furiously down upon the carriage. As they approached nearer she saw that these men were masked, and she drew back with a face that was pale, though resolute and calm.

'I fear me, mem, there are highwaymen upon us,' she said; 'but dinna fear ower much. The lads behind hae their pistols loaded. I telled them to luik to it at the last halting-place, not being ower pleased with the ways of the place. I doot but this thing was kenned by them there; but if they do rob us they will na gain muckle for their pains.'

Mary's face also paled, but it was as much through excitement as fear. She heard already the thud of approaching

horse-hoofs, the hail of loud and authoritative voices. She understood that this was no idle alarm on the part of Janet, but that some attack was about to be made upon them.

'I should not wish any blood spilt, any lives lost,' she said in quiet tones, though her heart beat thick and fast; 'I trust Peter and Jacob will be cautious and patient.'

'I dinna think they will stand idle whilst the ill loons harm their mistress, mem,' answered Janet; but the next moment she uttered a quick exclamation, and cried out,—

'Then it is as I said, it is a vile plot. Mem, there is more in this than we think for. The lads behind have been drugged, or some ill has befallen them. They have fired never a shot, they have raised never a cry. And as for these post-boys, they have left the horses, and have run for their lives. We are at the mercy of yon band of ruffians.'

It was too true. The postillions, upon finding themselves attacked by so large a band, had simply sprung from their saddles and fled in the direction whence they had come. Not a sound from behind showed whether the two men-servants were living or dead. Mary was almost more alarmed for them than for herself at this moment. Had they been made away with in some foul and secret fashion whilst the carriage proceeded?—or had they been heavily drugged and rendered useless at the last stopping-place, where suspicion had already been aroused, at least in Janet's breast?

But there was no time to ascertain this point. The carriage was already surrounded, and one of the masked men, dismounting from his horse, opened the door and addressed the lady roughly and rudely,—

'We must trouble you, madam, to come with us,' he said. 'We have no more wish than you can have to be benighted in a snow-storm out on the moors, but we must examine our prize before we let it go, and you and your attendant must be searched for valuables, which doubtless you carry upon

your persons. We shall therefore drive you to the nearest shelter the moor affords, and the less resistance you make the better it will be for you.'

Mary made no reply, but merely leaned back in the carriage, her face pale and stern. That they were perfectly helpless she knew well. There was nothing for it but to submit, and to trust to the mighty arm of Providence to help them safely out of this peril.



The door was banged to again. The mounted men took the horses' reins and urged the beasts into a gallop. There was no sparing now of whip or spur, and the carriage bounded along over the rough road with a perilous velocity.

The two women looked at each other with mutual understanding, and their hands met and clasped in the darkness of the gathering night.

'There is more in this than ordinary highway robbery,'

said Mary in low tones. 'I do not know much, but I am certain that this is not the method of ordinary attack. What it does mean I cannot guess ; but these men are not practised freebooters.'

'Ye are right, mem ; I ken that weel. We must watch and luik weel about us, an' try an' see what they be at. It is a part o' some foul plot, and they of yon post-house were in it. I would I kenned what has become o' the twa laddies. They were na left behind ; but I dinna ken what can have happened to them since.'

'We shall know in time,' said Mary ; 'I do not think violence is intended.'

'If it be, I'll dee sooner than any shall touch thee, mem !' cried Janet fiercely ; 'I hae a good strong arm, and I ken I can use it weel if the time comes.'

'I am thankful indeed to have you with me, Janet,' said Mary ; 'if I had only a timid girl, what should I do in such a plight ?'

'Lassies are no fit but to bide at hame,' said Janet briefly ; then there was silence between the captives, whilst Mary tried to divine what could be the meaning of this extraordinary attack, and utterly failed.

She was not, however, as much alarmed as might have been expected. There was something sufficiently forced and unnatural about the whole thing to excite suspicion rather than terror in her mind. She felt convinced that true highwaymen would have had her baggage, and perhaps her person, searched then and there ; would have possessed themselves of their booty, and have ridden off at once. This dragging off of her person was an innovation upon the traditions of the road which at once assured her that there was something unusual in the attack. The peril, to be sure, might be all the greater ; but Mary had no lack of courage, and her faith in God's protecting care of His children was so vivid and so real that she was enabled to face even the thought of personal peril with perfect calmness. Nothing

could harm her without His will, and in silent prayer for aid the next minutes were passed.

Then, in the darkness and the snow, the carriage stopped at a small and deserted hut. The occupants were bidden to alight, and hurried into a small room, where a fire was burning on the hearth, and where upon the table were the remains of some sort of meal.

'You can wait there till we have examined the carriage,' said the masked man who had spoken before; 'we will come back to you presently,' and so saying he thrust them within the room and retired, locking the door after him.

'Come ye to the fire, mem,' said Janet, drawing up the one chair the room possessed, and lighting a candle which stood on the table. 'It is something to get warmth for the body again; and cheer up, mem, the laddies are a' safe. They be sleeping on their seat behind like tykes by a winter's fire. They be tied safe to their seat too; it's plain they were drugged ere they left yon post-house.'

'What does it all mean, Janet?' asked Mary, lifting her pale perplexed face to that of the honest Scotchwoman. 'We are not carried off like this for nothing. What can it bode?'

'I dinna ken yet, mem, but I doubt na I'll ken before long,' answered Janet; 'we live in ill days, and the wicked flourish like a green bay-tree, but there be honest lads in the world yet, and when Peter and Jacob awake from their trance, I doot na but what they an' I will find out something to help free ye, my leddy.'

'Hark! what is that?' cried Mary, and her cheeks turned white, for she heard the quick report of fire-arms, the shout of angry voices, the clash of cold steel.

Janet sprang to her feet, and stood beside the door, her eyes dilating with excitement. She had seized up the poker and planted herself between the door and the hearth, as if ready to defend her lady at the cost of her own life.

Blows, curses, oaths resounded from without—there were long minutes of dire confusion, and the clash of weapons

was terrible to hear. Then the key turned in the lock, the door was burst open, and Captain Fortescue, his clothes torn and stained with blood, his hair dishevelled, and his face pale as death, stood before them. Making one stride forward he threw himself at Mary's feet.

'Thank Heaven you are safe! Thank Heaven I did not come too late!' he cried, possessing himself of her hand and pressing it to his lips. 'Do not fear, sweet lady. Yon caitiff hounds are scattered to the four winds. They will some of them carry to their graves the marks of this night's conflict. But you are safe, you are saved! Thank Heaven I had wind of this vile attack—that I did not come too late.'

Mary Ernscliff had risen to her feet and was gazing bewildered upon the young officer. His face was ghastly pale, but he appeared to have voice and strength enough to explain more fully his sudden appearance, and she drew herself a little farther off, bewildered and perplexed, and strangely disconcerted by this sudden apparition.

'Captain Fortescue, how came you here? Are you hurt? What does it all mean?'

'It means, sweet Mary, that I have come to rescue you—to save you, or to die for you!' cried the young man with all the fervid eloquence which was the fashion of his day. 'A rumour was brought to me that your carriage was to be attacked on the road, and, since hearing that, I have galloped without drawing rein over the untrodden snow to save you—to rescue you. What matters it if I be hurt? I have saved you—that is all I know—all I can think of. Think you I would grudge to lay down my life in your service? It is no hurt that has been gotten in saving you from harm.'

There was something in this speech that savoured so much of preparation and theatric effect that Mary involuntarily shrank back. In the bewilderment of this strange adventure she knew not how to think or reason; but her womanly instincts, which were true and keen, did not fail

her even at this crisis, and instinct warned her that there was a false ring about the captain's eloquence.

'If you are hurt, sir, my good maid here will give you all tendance. I grieve that you should have received hurt in my cause. I thank you for——'

'Thank him not, lady!' All present turned with a start, and Mary and Janet simultaneously exclaimed, 'Tom Heron!' and stood gazing at the intruder rather as if he had risen from the very ground at their feet. They had been dimly aware that some fresh disturbance had been going on without; but so absorbing had been the interest of the scene before them that they had paid no special heed to this.

Tom Heron took one step forward and stood before Mary Ernscliff, his dark eyes flashing, his voice quivering with scarcely repressed indignation and wrath.

'Thank him not, lady—thank not yon man, who calls himself an officer and a gentleman, and would have you believe he has risked his life to save you. The whole of this night's work is a vile plot to entrap you, and force you into reluctant wedlock with him out of gratitude for his professed rescue. It was he who planned it all from first to last. I will prove it upon him if he dares deny it. I have witnesses here whom I can bring forward. I have the witness of his own handwriting here in my hand. Do you know his writing, lady? Then read this paper. It has just been taken from the leader of those same fellows—his servants—who are yet lurking round, ready, if he needs them again, to help to carry you off by force, if you still prove obdurate to his suit. Nay, sir; the lady shall see for herself!' cried Tom Heron, throwing himself between the furious captain and the shrinking figure of the lady of Ernscliff, who was holding a closely written paper, and perusing it with steady attention.

'Fellow, you lie! I will not be thus insulted!' and with an oath the professedly wounded captain sprang upon Tom

Heron with the strength and fury of a madman. But the young blacksmith was his match in strength, and held him clasped tight in his brawny arms until Mary had finished the perusal of the document. Struggle as he would, the captain could not free himself from that bear-like embrace, and the furious and profane oaths he hurled at his captor made the lady of Ernscliff shudder as she stood.

She looked up from the paper, and dropped it quietly into the fire.

‘Let him go now, Tom,’ she said very quietly; ‘I do not think he will trouble us more. Captain Fortescue, for the sake of your family and your sister, whom I must always love, I will say no word to you about this night’s work; but remember that we meet no more henceforth save as strangers. May God forgive you and turn your heart! that is all I have to say. I ask you now only to be gone. I bear you no ill-will, but I desire that it be long before I see your face again.’

Something in the perfect calmness of this dismissal took its effect even upon the excited blood of the young officer. He saw that his plot had failed; he was helpless and powerless. There was nothing for it but to go. He had played for heavy stakes, and had lost. He knew when the game was up. He turned and went without a word to her.

Only as he crossed the threshold he looked back at Tom and said, with scintillating eyes,—

‘Tom Heron, you have thought it good to cross my path—to defy and thwart me. The day will come when I will be avenged on you for this night’s work!’

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RETURN TO SAX.

THE whole village was in a ferment of excitement. At the Red Dragon the parlour behind the bar was full to overflowing. Mike Portway was in danger of having his head turned in more senses than one ; and his tale, already a thrice-told one, appeared never to pall upon his entranced listeners.

‘Lawk-a-mussy ! to think on the likes on it ! Whatever will madam say ? The cap’en trying to carry off our lady of Ernscliff, and Tom Heron a-coming to the rescue ! Why didn’t thee bring Tom along with thee, Mike ? It’s a rare welcome we’d give un now ! I allers said as there was grit in Tom ; it were only them Methodies as turned his head for a spell.’

Glegg waved his pipe in the air with a gesture which seemed to say that all past faults and follies on Tom’s part should be condoned in the light of his recent exploit. It was about noon that very day that Mrs. Mary’s carriage had been descried returning to the village ; and great had been the astonishment of Sax to observe that the carriage was attended by a band of four riders on horseback. When these four turned out to be Tom Heron, Mike Portway, Jos Dawson, and a stranger evidently known to these three, public excitement rose to a high pitch. Eager hands had been outstretched to detain the riders as they trotted on in the wake of the carriage ; but all save Mike had followed it up to

Ernscliff, and he had only paused to speak a few words to his mother, and had then galloped after the rest, promising, however, to return later and tell all the story.

From the few words he had then dropped, the village had become apprised that there had been something of an exciting nature in connection with Mrs. Mary's journey. It was all over the place in less than an hour, that she had been attacked by highwaymen, and that Tom Heron and the other boys of Sax had risked their lives to save her. How the adventure had come about, and how it chanced that the Methodist preacher and the young recruits from York happened to be on the spot at the critical moment, nobody knew or very much cared. It was enough that Sax had heroes of its own, and Mike's reappearance was waited for with the greatest expectation and impatience.

When he did come his story proved even more thrilling than had been anticipated. Naturally it lost nothing in the telling. Mary Ernscliff would very gladly have kept the thing private, and have requested, in particular, that no mention should be made of Captain Fortescue's discreditable action in this matter ; but her common-sense told her that it would be impossible to hush up a flagrant act of lawlessness, which was known to a number of persons, all connected with Sax and its environs ; and her own unflinching uprightness made her shrink from imposing upon any other persons an injunction of secrecy which they would find it hard to observe, and which might lead them to fall into falsehood and equivocation.

After all, according to the lax ideas so prevalent in the upper circles of society, the captain's action would only be looked upon as a rather dashing and daring attempt at winning a bride, and would be, if anything, something of a feather in his cap. Most likely the most galling part of the business to the young blade himself, would be the fact that he had been thwarted in his plan through the interference of a ranting Methodist. At any rate, Mary Ernscliff, after

turning the matter well over in her mind, had resolved to make no great effort after secrecy. The truth, she was certain, would of necessity come to light before long, and it might be just as well to have the excitement over early as late.

So Mike had gone down to the village, after receiving, reluctantly enough, the thanks of the ladies of Ernscliff, coupled with a handsome reward, and now the whole village knew his story, and were calling for it again and again with every fresh arrival at the Red Dragon.

‘And so thee went on with her to Bantock, did thee? And did thee stay all the time she was there?’

‘Ay, that we did, and brought her safe back to Sax again at the end of the four days. Did ye think we’d have left her to travel alone after what had gone before? There were four on us stout fellows—Tom and Jos, and Dick Carew, as was converted by Tom’s preaching in the barrack-yard, and got his discharge with us, just before we heard of what the captain purposed. I reckon the captain won’t care to show his face here for a bit. I reckon, too, he’ll do a bad turn to any of us if he can; leastways, if he knows as we was there. He saw Tom, and knew him fast enough, but I don’t know if he paid any heed to the rest of us. Tom had best look to his own skin if ever the captain comes nigh him again.’

‘It were half a pity, too, as he didn’t run off with her and wed her,’ observed the landlord, who was heart and soul a Fortescue partisan; ‘they do say as Mrs. Mary has a pretty fortune of her own now, and I’m thinking it be a pity she should not change her name to Fortescue, and give us Fortescues at Ernscliff as well as at Rookwood.’

‘And who says as she won’t one of these days?’ asked Glegg, just winking his eye, with a slow humour. ‘There be more ways of doing that than by her being run off with to Gretna Green by a dashing young sogger—eh, neighbours?’

There was a murmur of assent from Glegg’s cronies,

who made it a point of honour to agree with him ; and the clerk went on in his slow, drawling way,—

‘Muster Hugh, he be main fond of Sax. I tell ye he might have been rector of yon fine church over by Wilton Abbots, where Lord and Lady Lovel live, and his sister did everything she could to coax him to come and live there ; for she was always main fond of Muster Hugh. But no, he wouldn’t budge an inch from Sax ; not though madam flew into one of her rages, and peppered him well with her tongue, for a fool and a Methodist in disguise. He said as his work lay at Sax, and at Sax he meant to stay. The rector had offered him the curacy, and he had took it, and here he would stop. But mark me, neighbours, he don’t stay altogether for love of we ; not but what he does us a power of good, and for a young man he has a fine gift of preaching, though it would be more respectable-like if he would look more at his paper, and not speak so much of it out of his own head like. But why do he leave his comfortable home, and take Mr. Latham’s old lodgings at Widow Tring’s ? Why, that there cottage is but a stone’s throw from the Ernscliff property, and he, like Mr. Latham, looks after Ernscliff as well as Sax. I’ve got eyes in my head, that I have. I know a thing or two, and one of these days we shall all hear something we shall like. And even madam then will smooth down her feathers, I reckon ; but she will be in a fine taking to hear how Tom Heron has bested the captain, for she was always a friend to that match.’

‘Be Tom Heron coming back to Sax to live ?’ asked several voices of Mike. ‘We’d be glad to have un amongst us again. He be a fine fellow, be Tom. Why didn’t thee bring un along with thee to-night ? He should have a welcome, that he should.’

‘He was that took up with Molly that he had no thought for any one else,’ answered Mike ; ‘and Tom don’t ever drink naught but water nowadays, and he’d likely not care to come

to the Red Dragon, unless it were to speak his mind to them as were there. He's a powerful gift of preaching, has Tom. Why, he was sent round the country last summer into all sorts of wild places; and then he came to York, and we had him often to the barrack-yard. Tom Heron isn't the lad he was when he lived here; but he's a right good fellow for all that, nothing of canting or snivelling about un. I'd lay down my life for Tom, that I would right gladly, and I know he'd lay down his sooner than do a thing he thought was wrong.'

Michael's honest admiration for his old comrade evoked a species of sympathetic enthusiasm from his audience, who were now quite disposed to look upon Tom as a hero. They would have been glad to hear that he proposed living once more amongst them, but Mike did not suppose that likely. At any rate they meant to give him a very warm welcome when he did appear; and great was Tom's surprise, and something his confusion, upon the following day to find himself a person of such importance wherever he appeared, welcomed by young and old with every mark of cordiality, and pressed on all hands to make a long stay, or even to settle again in his old quarters at Ernscliff, and be one of themselves once more.

Nobody gave him a heartier reception than his Uncle Samson. The forge was dear to Tom from old association, and it was pleasant to him to swing the great hammers once again, and to stand beside the anvil and give blow for blow upon the molten metal with the senior smith.

For some time little was said between them. Tom had dropped in at a busy time, and had taken up his position as his uncle's assistant almost as a matter of course. But when the dusk fell and the forge fire glowed warm and red, when work had slackened off, and the two men stood face to face alone together, Samson put out his brawny arm and laid his hand on Tom's shoulder, saying, with unwonted display of feeling,—

‘It is good to see thee once again, to have thee back in thy old place, Tom, my boy.’

‘It is good of thee to feel it so,’ answered Tom, ‘for I was a power of trouble to thee in old days.’

‘If thee has but turned a new leaf, as I verily believe, thee wilt hear naught of old days from me, Tom,’ answered Samson. ‘Come to the house, and tell me all thy tale. The village is on fire with it, but I would have it from thine own lips.’

Long and earnestly did the two men talk together over their homely dish of tea, a luxury the smith allowed himself from time to time, and to which Tom was very partial, though tea was an expensive luxury not much seen in humble homes. The old morose reserve which had characterised Tom’s first days of religious fervour had passed completely away, and he spoke out fully and frankly of himself, his trials, his temptations, his convictions, and his resolutions. Having become practised in speaking, he could do it well, and Samson listened with undivided attention and interest. Before the tale was ended came a knock at the outer door, and Samson, who had risen to answer the summons, came back with a look of pride upon his face, ushering in Hugh Fortescue, now the clergyman in whose cure lay the villages of Ernscliff and Sax.

Tom rose quickly to his feet, and Hugh held out his hand.

‘I have been wanting to see you and to thank you, Tom, ever since I heard yesterday of the service you were able to render us all in coming to the assistance of Mrs. Mary Ernscliff. It was told me in the village that I should find you here. Sit down, Samson, sit down, Tom; yes, let me have a cup of your good tea, and pray do not let me interrupt the conversation. I am sure Tom is telling you something of his story. I am as wishful to hear that as even you can be.’

Hugh had the gift of a truly well-bred man, that of putting at ease with a few words those who found themselves in his company. In a short time Tom was speaking as freely

to him as he had formerly done to his uncle, and the three men were quickly engrossed in a discussion partly theological, partly personal, with as much mutual understanding and lack of constraint as though they had been socially on an equality. All Tom's old instinctive hostility to the ministers of the Established Church had vanished. He had begun to enter into Mary Ernscliff's and Mr. Wesley's conception of a Church large enough, catholic enough, to embrace all true believers in Christ. The old feeling prompting him to feel, if not to say, 'I am right, and you are wrong,' was merging in the wider and truer conception of a faith which sees how the Church, though, alas, divided into hostile camps, divided against herself, is yet all one, each part holding some great integral truth, each with its own share of the light, though some with less and some with more. So his instinct now was to exclaim, 'Yes, you are right, my brother; you have light too. Give me all of yours that I do not hold, and take of me that which I have, which may have been lost by you. Let us not strive and contend; let us help one another, and find in the Word of God which guides us both, not contradiction and paradox, but the most perfect harmony and agreement.'

'Tom,' said Hugh, after they had talked for some time, 'I could find it in my heart to wish, if it were not taking you from a wider and more useful sphere elsewhere, that you would come and work with me in and around Sax.'

Tom looked up surprised, and Hugh continued eagerly,—

'Yes, Tom, I mean it. There is a great work to be done here, and how to accomplish it single-handed I do not know. There are the stone quarries over against Writtingdon. They have increased in size very greatly these past years, and the people are living in a state of absolute heathenism. There are the colliers at Hownston. Since the split in the Methodist camp two years back, little has been accomplished there. Half the community went over to the Moravians, while the chapel which was built is occupied by the Calvinist

fraternity, and the hold upon the colliers is almost gone. My uncle the rector would be very glad for me to institute regular teaching and instruction amongst them, and we know the way has been paved. But single-handed I can accomplish little, and I have not much experience of these rougher phases of life. Tom, if you would join me, I believe a great work might be done around Sax.'

Tom's eyes lighted. The very notion of a distinct and urgently needed mission, especially amongst men of his own place and his own class, appealed to him powerfully; but he could not shake off old feelings, old associations, and he looked straight at Hugh as he said,—

'Wherever there is work to do for God, I will gladly be a worker. But how would it be possible for you to have a Methodist working under you? I am a Methodist; I will not recall the name. I will not seem to be ashamed of the cause to which I have given myself, heart and soul. I know now that there need be no hostility betwixt Methodism and the Church, but it took me long to learn it, and others do not know. They will not understand. They will think and wonder——'

'And will that hurt us?' asked Hugh, smiling. 'May it not help to prove to them by the experience of their own senses that what we strive to set before them, the wonderful unity and beauty and harmony of God's purposes towards men, is no mere figure of speech, but a practical reality? You are right not to give up your old name, to stick to your colours, even though we see that it would be better, if we could, to avoid all names and factions, and be content to belong to the fold of Christ without distinction. Tom, I do not ask you to cease to be a Methodist; I only ask if you think that you can work with me, and help me to do the work that seems to rise up before me and claim me as its servant.'

'What will madam say?'

The question was too natural not to provoke a smile, but Hugh's reply was grave enough.

‘My mother may not approve. I am sorry we cannot agree in all things; but where such is the case we must agree to differ. You would not be a tenant of ours. You would remain, I doubt not, in the cottage upon the Ernscliff estate which is ready for you. We will think of all these things later, when you have had time to see your way and make up your mind. It is not a matter to be decided in haste. But there is no lack of work to be done in and around Sax, and I have many times thought, in contemplating it, that Tom Heron would be the best assistant I could have.’

A flush rose in Tom’s cheek. It was sweeter to him to hear words like these from one who had known and seen him in his wild and lawless days, and who had known the details of his early life, than to receive higher praise from strangers, who only knew by hearsay of his dark past. To be honoured and looked up to in his native place had been a thing Tom had never hoped to achieve. He felt a throb of gratitude and exultation he could not have expressed in words. Surely if he had been the means in Sax of leading others astray, this might be a call from God Himself to a work that should make some amends for the sins and follies of the past. He paused awhile in deep thought, and then said,—

‘Sir, have you any objection to my writing to Mr. Wesley and taking his advice? He gave me leave to do so, if ever I was in doubt and difficulty, and I believe he would advise me well. I am afraid of being too much led by personal inclination.’

‘By all means write to him,’ answered Hugh. ‘I have the greatest confidence in Mr. Wesley’s judgment and Christian discernment. Write to him, and abide by the advice you receive. And meantime, as all Sax is clamouring to hear you preach, I hope you will address your old neighbours and comrades in the churchyard on Sunday next. If you were an ordained man I would invite you to use my pulpit.’

‘Thank you, sir, but I do not think I could preach any-

where so well as in the open air. I love to have the canopy of heaven over me. If you wish it I will gladly do so, but——'

'I do wish it. You will teach them no new doctrine; you will but put before them in perhaps a more forcible and homely way the same truths as I try week by week to impress upon them. I think I need not ask you now whether I may hope to see you at the service, and at the Lord's table earlier in the day. With your permission I shall do myself the pleasure of hearing your sermon when the time comes, and I shall advise my people to come and hear it when I address them in the morning.'

'Sir,' said Samson, as Hugh rose to his feet and held out his hand to Tom, 'I verily believe that if all this land were served with men like you and Mr. Latham, there would be but one fold beneath one Shepherd throughout its length and breadth.'

'I am in these things but the pupil of our dear departed teacher,' said Hugh, with feeling. 'Tom, do you know that your name was the last on Mr. Latham's lips before he died?—that you were his last charge to me? For that alone, if for no other reason, I think that you and I must always be friends.'

Tom was startled by finding his eyes wet with tears.

'I never valued Mr. Latham as I should,' he said; 'I have wished unsaid, wished undone, so many of my words and acts to him. I was very blind in those days, but perhaps he understands now. I think he knew when we parted last that I should one day understand.'

It seemed as if Sax were to be kept in a perpetual ferment of excitement. The church on Sunday was crowded, partly because every one wished to obtain a glimpse of the lady of Ernscliff after her adventure, partly because all were anxious to see if Tom Heron would be there. Of late the church had always been well attended, but to-day it would scarcely contain the worshippers. Yet not one present but felt himself amply rewarded for having come, when Tom Heron, in a

white surplice, stood forward to read the lessons, his clear enunciation, learned in preaching, and his naturally good voice and accent, refined of late through contact with men of culture, giving to the familiar words a force and emphasis which many had never believed them to possess before.

It was observed by some that madam started when she saw who occupied the lectern, and that she drew the curtain sharply, as if to shut out the obnoxious sight, but few had any thought to spare for her; and there was yet another and greater surprise in store for the people when their young clergyman calmly announced that their old comrade Tom Heron would at two o'clock deliver a sermon in the churchyard, and that the afternoon service would in consequence be postponed for half an hour, and not commence till half-past three.

Not a creature who had been in church, save madam, failed to be present in the churchyard at two o'clock, to hear Tom Heron give an address upon the parable of the Prodigal Son. As he delivered his own version of the wickedness, the broken-hearted misery, the repentance of that erring son, many amongst his audience wept aloud; and when he came to speak of the love of the father, the love which made him see and recognise the wanderer whilst he was yet 'a long way off,'—how the son had not to plead with hired servants admission to his father's house, but was met and brought in by that father himself, his own voice shook and faltered, and there was scarcely a dry eye to be found amongst his congregation.

He preached for an hour to a silent and breathless crowd, and it was Hugh who stood beside him to pronounce the benediction at the end, and shake the preacher by the hand before them all. But perhaps the greatest triumph of the hour was when Janet Dawson stood forward—the Scotchwoman who had been a cold and bitter enemy of Methodist ways and teaching all these years—and taking him by the hand exclaimed,—

‘Eh, laddie, laddie, but it’s a wunnerful doctrine ye preach, an’ I will na ca’ ye a vessel of wrath again, nor yet my own laddie, as ye helped to turn to the Lord. Maybe ye are richt, an’ that He does na damn them from eternity. I’d fain believe that He was watching for each of them to come hame, that He would see them afar off, and lead them back His ain sel’. It wud be a gran’ thing for this wicked world gin it were so.’

‘Thank you for your sermon, Tom,’ said Mary Ernscliff, as she passed into the church ; and Glegg, not to be behindhand with the great folks, seized Tom by the hand and said,—

‘Eh, but you have improved rarely ; you have a firm grip on the gospel now. I allers said to my neighbours there that a few more reasonings with me on Scripture doctrines would make a man of you yet !’

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SURRENDER OF MARY ERNSCLIFF.

‘**H**UGH, oh, I am so glad it is you!’

‘Mary, what are you doing out here alone?’

‘Do not be shocked; I did not intend to be so late. It was an accident.’

‘You have hurt yourself?’ speaking anxiously and quickly.

‘Hardly enough to be worth considering, but it hindered me walking home quickly. I am so glad that step was yours. I have grown nervous, I think, these last months, since——’

She stopped short. There was one episode in her life to which she seldom alluded in presence of any of the Fortescue family. Hugh took up the unfinished sentence and broke out impulsively,—

‘Since that cowardly attack upon you last winter. Nervous? I wonder you have ever had courage to go abroad alone since. I am not sure that I would not forbid it if I had the power. Mary, Mary, when will you learn that you are not fit to take care of yourself? that you are not fit to be alone?’

She looked up at him from her seat upon a felled tree. In the wood the spring twilight was fast changing to darkness, but she could see that his face was unwontedly agitated, and a quick wave of colour flushed her own cheek. She rose slowly to her feet, and he saw that she was slightly lame.

‘Take my arm,’ said Hugh, placing himself beside her; ‘I will see you home.’

‘Thank you, I should be grateful if you would. I was visiting old Betty Dew, and slipped down her narrow staircase in the dark. I did not know I had hurt my foot, but when I had walked a little way I found myself growing lame. I suppose I have given it a little twist; but it is very slight.’

She placed her hand upon his arm, and they moved on slowly through the whispering wood together. The trees were still bare of leaves, save a few sycamores and early beeches, which had just burst into the first tender green of spring. The young moon hung like a silver lamp in the sky, and the breeze played like an *Æolian* harp in the tree-tops overhead.

Hugh felt himself tingling all over as he felt the touch of her hand, and they moved slowly on together. Burning words rose to his lips, to be held back only at the cost of a great effort. He was torn by the fierceness of the struggle within him, the longing to speak all that was in his heart, the fear lest he should speak in vain, and so sunder the sweet friendship that had grown up between them these past years. Had she ever ceased to mourn the lover of her girlhood? And even if time had healed that wound, there was a barrier now between them in her wealth. For though Hugh would not be a poor man, his means were small compared with those of the lady of Ernscliff; and it was impossible for him to forget that one of his name and race had striven to win by cowardly and foul means the woman whose money he had prized above herself.

Lovers are prone to self-torment and diffidence, and Hugh had said in his heart many times that his cousin's disgraceful outrage had for ever closed his own way with Mary, even had there been a chance for him before. He had seen her often, but seldom alone; and he was almost alarmed at the intensity of his emotion as he found himself conducting her through the dim wood. They had still a mile to go ere they reached Ernscliff, and her progress was but slow. For half

an hour he would have her all to himself. A sense of almost fierce joy came over him; but to his companion he seemed tongue-tied and abstracted, and she looked up in his face presently, and asked,—

‘Were you coming from the quarries, Hugh? Is anything wrong there to make you so grave?’

‘Oh no; since Tom Heron has taken up his quarters amongst the men it is wonderful how civilised they are becoming. He has a strange power over those great rough fellows, whom I personally hardly know how to approach. I sometimes think I am almost superfluous, except in Sax itself.’

‘You must not think that,’ answered Mary, smiling. ‘Tom is excellent as a lay helper; I wish there were more of his kind, but we cannot on that account do without our priest and pastor. You are not dissatisfied with your small parish, Hugh?’

‘Sometimes I think I ought to leave,’ answered Hugh in a muffled voice.

He felt Mary’s hand flutter on his arm, as though she were somewhat disturbed. Her voice had a troubled ring in it as she said,—

‘Oh, surely not, Hugh; you have done so much for us. You do not really mean to leave us?’

‘Mary, Mary, would you miss me, if I were to go?’ said Hugh.

Something of the struggle going on within him made itself manifest as he spoke these words. Mary was a woman of deep susceptibilities, and she knew all in a moment what this sudden emotion boded. The sensitive colour flamed in her cheek, but the darkness hid it; her hand trembled on his arm, but it was not withdrawn. Rather she leaned a little more upon him as she answered softly,—

‘I should miss you dreadfully, Hugh. I hope you will not leave us!’

Did he feel that in those words more was meant than met

the ear? Did he know that he was understood, and that this was Mary's own way of paving the way before him? Was he conscious of an electric wave of sympathy passing from heart to heart? Five minutes ago he had braced his will against any sort of declaration; now the burning words overflowed, and he found himself in the midst of passionate speech.

'Mary, Mary, how am I to tell you? It is because I love you that I know not how to stay in Sax, that I know not how to go on meeting you day after day, and every day, and yet not speak of my love. Ah, Mary, I know that I ought not to hope—you are so much higher than I, purer, holier, like a star in yon darkening sky! I know that you have cause to hate the very name I bear, to drive me from you with words of scorn. Oh, Mary! if you were but poor, I would fling myself at your feet and beg you to come to me and share the little that I have; but you are rich, you are courted, there are hundreds who would gladly woo and win you, who would sneer at me for a needy fortune-hunter. Mary, when I think sometimes of these things, and of what you must think of us Fortescues, my heart and courage fail, and it is then I say in myself that I must leave Sax, that I cannot go on day after day seeing you, and holding back what is in my heart.'

'And you thought that I should visit on you what your cousin did in the heat of a mad passion of desperation? Oh, Hugh!'

'How could I tell but what you might think that my motive in trying to win you was the same as his?'

She turned to him with a smile in her eyes which it was light enough for him to see.

'Do you think I do not know you better than that Hugh?'

Hugh suddenly stopped short, and turned and faced her, taking both her hands in a close, hot clasp.

'Mary,' he said, and there was a strange vibration in his

voice, 'I love you. I must tell you so at all cost. I love you, and if I may not win you I must leave Sax, for I cannot bear to see you daily, and know that you can never be mine. Mary, my fate is in your hands. Tell me, must I go, or may I stay?'

Her face was slightly raised to his. He saw the shining brightness of her eyes.

'Stay, Hugh,' she answered softly; 'we cannot spare you—I cannot spare you.'

'You love me, Mary?' He could hardly believe his ears, and his words came with vehement urgency.

'I love you, Hugh,' she answered softly.

'Well, my dear, I am very glad to hear it,' said Mrs. Bridget, when the news reached her; and she forthwith set out to see and congratulate her future niece. 'It isn't that I set such store by the men-folk as some women do. They think a vast deal too much of themselves for the most part, and their wives spoil them and puff them up, and make them worse than Nature did, and that's saying something. But all the same for that, it's a lone thing for a woman to live by herself, especially if she has land and property to care for. Your good grandmother may be taken away before very long, and Ernscliff would be very solitary without a companion.'

'I think I would rather be solitary than have any companion except the right one,' answered Mary, smiling. 'But then Hugh is the right one, so that is all right.'

'Yes, yes, that is the way to look at things, the right man or none at all. That is how I have felt all my life; and as the right man has never turned up, I have been very happy to have been without one at all. I have been happier keeping my good brother's house than many women with their own homes and husbands. But all the same, my dear, as you have no brother and no near kinsfolk, I am very glad to see you settled in life; and all the Fortescues will rejoice at welcoming you into the family.'

This saying was certainly verified by the event. Of late madam had held very little intercourse with Ernscliff, and she had showed herself anything but friendly towards her own son. She had taken great umbrage at the way in which Tom Heron had been received in Sax, after she had declared him to be an outcast and a reprobate, and for once in her life she had been set at defiance by public opinion. Even the squire had been against her, and had declined to use his authority in the matter.

Tom Heron, a professed Methodist, and acting under the sanction and approval of Mr. Wesley, had returned to his old neighbourhood, and was working at the reclamation of the outlying districts of the parishes of Sax and Hownston under the direction of Hugh Fortescue, and with the consent and approval of the rector of the town. At first madam had simply refused to believe such a gross violation of the common decencies of life (as she chose to consider it) could be countenanced by her brother-in-law, and she had flown to him to pour out her wrath, and obtain his support and assistance. But the rector was one of the few persons in the neighbourhood who did not fear madam and her vehemence, and he answered her quietly and genially, but very firmly, telling her that if she knew more of Church history, especially in primitive times, she would not see any innovation in the fact that the clergy suffered themselves to be assisted by laymen in ministering to the flock; and that, for his part, he felt sure the day was coming when such help would be revived, and prove of the very greatest value to all. There was, to be sure, the alternative of getting Tom Heron instructed sufficiently to pass the bishop's examination, and having him ordained, but he did not himself think such a step advisable. He was not of the stuff of which students are made, and might be very unhappy as a servitor in either of the universities. He did very well as he was, and paved the way amongst the rough miners and colliers for the clergy to work there after him. For his own part he

was glad enough that the thing should be done by those who looked to him, or to his nephew, for help and guidance. His nephew was a young man full of energy, and wanted a wide field for his faculties. Let him and Tom Heron do what they could. He should not interfere ; indeed, he was only too glad that the work should be done, and that in the doing of it no spirit of hostility to the Church should be aroused.

‘The Methodists, my dear madam,’ he said, ‘will generally work with us, if we will let them ; and if we refuse, and they become schismatic, the fault will be ours as much as theirs. If they are doing good, let us keep them with us as long as we can. If they eventually break away, let that be their doing, not ours, and our consciences will be free. I shall not interfere if Hugh chooses to get Tom Heron to help him. I doubt not that that wild youth, reclaimed from his sins by these same Methodists, has turned more souls to Christ than I have done all my long life.’

So madam was forced to go away angry and baffled, and she had vented her displeasure mainly in being very cool to Hugh whenever he was at Rookwood, and in showing herself exceedingly distant towards the ladies of Ernscliff on the occasions when a meeting was inevitable.

Fulk and Athol were by this time established at Rookwood, and they made large amends for madam’s whims and tempers by the friendly and easy hospitality always to be found in their quarters of the big house. To do madam justice, she was devotedly attached to her eldest son and his wife, and never resented what they might like to say or do ; and when very early in the year a small son had made his appearance there, her delight was so great that she had almost taken the whole world back into favour again.

A few months later, therefore, when Hugh’s engagement to the heiress of Ernscliff became an accomplished fact, she deigned to forget her displeasure, and come forward with her congratulations in quite a gush of maternal tenderness ; whilst Mary, always gentle and ready for peace (though able

to hold her own when occasion demanded), was more than ready to let bygones be bygones, and receive Hugh's mother with all affection and respect.

'I suppose, dear,' said madam presently, 'that Hugh will resign his curacy, and give himself over to the management of Ernscliff?'

'He will live here, of course, when we are married,' answered Mary, with a little blush; 'but I do not think he will give up his curacy. I do not see how he could be content to do so. He has taken upon himself his ordination vows—he has professed himself, truly and devoutly, to have felt himself called by God's Holy Spirit, and he has dedicated himself to the service of the Church. I am quite sure he will never draw back from that service. He will help me with the estate, I doubt not, but the higher work must come first.'

Madam did not argue the point. She felt instinctively that upon such matters words and arguments were alike thrown away. Hugh and Mary would judge for themselves, according to a standard that was not hers. She must satisfy herself by knowing that her son had married a rich woman, and had by that means become one of the large landowners of the neighbourhood. If he chose to be eccentric, and hold the petty and ill-paid curacy of Sax at the same time, she could not prevent it. No doubt it would prove one of those harmless crazes which time and experience would cure.

Great and unbounded was the satisfaction in Sax when the news became known there. Of course it was Glegg who first got wind of it, and his complaisant triumph in the accomplishment of a prediction which had begun of late to be jeered at, was in itself a sight to see. He rose quite twenty per cent. in the eyes of himself and the neighbourhood, and the parlour of the Red Dragon was crowded the whole evening with those who came to learn the truth from the fountain head. To hear Glegg talk, one would think that he had been in the closest confidence of both bridegroom

and bride elect, and that to him had been confided the inner secrets of each heart. But the audience enjoyed the story none the less from the extraordinary detail in which it was told, and Glegg was in his glory for that and many following days.

Tom heard the news in due course, and it was from the lips of Mike Portway that he learned it first. Although Tom lived professedly in the cottage close to Ernscliff, he spent much of his time either at the quarries on the moors, or at the collieries outside Hownston, often staying several days amongst the rough men and women of those wild colonies, though returning home at frequent intervals to report to Hugh the success or failure attending his efforts, and to assist him in any parish work that might be allotted to him. Tom was, perhaps, more content and happy than he had been at any previous stage of his career. He had recovered all his bodily health, and had attained to a firm and steady faith, which was not dependent upon the changing moods of a quick and imaginative temperament. His work was congenial; he was amongst friends. His old comrades no longer sneered at or flouted him, and he no longer held aloof, and feared to be on friendly terms, lest they should drag him back into sin. He had plenty of hard work to do, and he did it well, and on the whole successfully, whilst he had just sufficient intercourse with those in a higher walk of life to keep alive and growing within him those instincts of refinement and intellectual activity which had always made him somewhat different from men of his own class.

It was with great pleasure and interest that he heard the news of the betrothal of Mrs. Mary to Hugh Fortescue. He turned to Mike with his flashing smile, and said, with that dash of poetry that often gave force or pathos to his words,—

‘Sure, Mike, that is one of the marriages that has been made in heaven. I think that heaven must watch over Mrs. Mary very closely; maybe, because she is half an angel herself.’

Mike discussed the news a little longer, and then grew uncommonly sheepish, making several futile attempts to change the subject, and colouring to the very tips of his ears.

'Why, Mike man, what is the matter?' asked Tom, aroused to curiosity by this unwonted behaviour. 'Thee be as red as a peony.'

'Well, it be talking of marriages, I've something to tell thee about another of them,' answered Mike, blushing like a girl; 'and I feel a bit afeared to, Tom, lest thee feel as I'd done thee an ill turn by it.'

Tom's wits were quick enough to jump to conclusions. He read in a moment all Mike would say, and a broad smile beamed over his face.

'Thee means thee is to be married thyself, Mike, and to Meg Dawson, I doubt not? Nay, lad, why should I take it amiss? I wish thee joy, and her too, with all my heart. She is a good lass, and a bonny one, and she will make thee a good wife. Thee needn't be afraid to tell me about it. I——'

'I was half afeared thee might be thinking again on her theeself,' said Mike; 'I know there was a time when thee and she were courting. And——'

'She would tell thee that I never said no serious word to her of marriage, save once, and then she would not listen. No, no, Mike; I've known this long time that my work isn't work for women-folk. I don't mean to think of marrying this many a year yet. Maybe I'll never have a wife at all. I have plenty to do without, and I can do more work for the Lord when I have but myself to keep. I'm right glad thee will have such a good wife, Mike, and I doubt not I'll have a welcome at thy fireside of a night when thee has a house of thine own. I'd like to see thee and Meg in housekeeping together, but I've got other things to think of myself.'

Tom's eyes looked away over the sweep of the hill-side where the stone quarries and their clustering huts nestled

together beneath an overhanging crag, and Mike saw an expression steal over his friend's face, the meaning of which he could not fathom, and which, therefore, awed him a little.

‘There be a power of work to do in this world, Mike,’ said Tom thoughtfully, almost dreamily. ‘It be some men’s work to marry and bide at home and keep the village life going, and there be others called out for something different; but they can all be doing the Lord’s work together. I be truly glad to hear what thee has told me to-day. I’ll tell Meg so when I see her next. I like to think of thee and she in that little home you’ll have together. But I don’t need a home like that. I want to be free to follow where the Lord leads, and when I die I should like to think as I’d be found there,—found at my post.’

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOUND AT HIS POST.

TOM HERON, don't thee go to preach at the quarries this even. There is mischief meant thee, if thee goes. If thee regards thy safety, stay away. From, One who knows.'

These words were scrawled, with many false spellings, upon a piece of dirty paper, and thrust beneath the door of Tom's cottage at Ernscliff. It was a Sunday morning, and he was eating his breakfast when blind Molly brought the scrap of paper she had found, and asked if it were anything of importance.

The young man cast his eyes over the words, and then folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket.

'Something about the preaching to-day,' he answered quietly, as he turned to his food again. 'Sit thee down, Molly lassie, and take thy breakfast with me.'

'Thee be going to preach at the colliery this morning, Tom?'

'Ay, and at the quarries at sundown. I like preaching there of a summer night, Molly; the great red sun dips down behind the hill opposite like a ball of fire, and the sky is all a blaze of gold and red and purple; and sometimes it seems as if one could look on and on and up into heaven itself, the great white gates of pearl, and the gold and precious stones of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is a beautiful world as God made it, my Molly, and only cruel and wicked and hideous where man's handiwork comes in. It sets one thinking sometimes what the eternal home will be like—where naught that defileth can enter in.'

It was not often that Tom spoke in this vein, and Molly looked at him with the wistful gaze of sightless eyes, as if to question mutely if anything were amiss.

'I would like to go with thee, Tom,' she said.

'Twould be too far for thee to walk, lassie; thee had better go to church with the rest. Maybe this evening towards sundown thee might find some one to walk out with thee towards the quarries, and I will bring thee home; but thee must not come alone.'

'I'd like to hear thee preach, Tom; thee does it so beautiful.'

He smiled and passed his hand thoughtfully across his brow.

'Well, well, if thee can find some trusty companion, thee can do as thee will; but it might be better for thee to bide at home to-day.'

'Why, Tom?'

'Nay, I know not. 'Tis but a feeling I have. God bless thee, lassie, and good-bye! Thou hast been a good sister and a blessing to me.'

He stooped over her and kissed her as he rose to go, and Molly, warmly returning the embrace, felt a sudden chill, as of misgiving or alarm. Tom was a very kind and gentle brother, but he was not demonstrative, and embraces between the two were of rare occurrence.

'Good-bye, Tom. There bean't anything the matter with thee, be there?' she asked tentatively, feeling helpless in her blindness to read his face for information, as others would have done.

'Nay, nay, there be naught amiss with me,' answered Tom, stroking her soft hair caressingly. 'But there be times in a man's life when he likes to speak a bit of his love, and I do love thee, Molly, my lassie, though there be times when I have been an ill brother to thee. Give my love to mother, if thee should see her. I be main glad she goes to church so regular, and that they keep no company

of a Sunday now at the Red Dragon. Sax be a different place from what it used to be four or five years back.'

'It do be indeed,' answered Molly eagerly; 'and folks say as thee has had a deal to do with it, Tom.'

'Folks speak a deal too well of me now,' said Tom thoughtfully, varying expressions chasing themselves over his face as he prepared to depart. 'Sometimes I wonder if it be good for one to be praised. The disciple should scarce be above his Lord, and He was despised and rejected. But there, there, He knows best, and He divides His gifts to every man as He will, sometimes keeping us in the shadow, sometimes bidding us walk on in sunshine.'

With one backward look at his old home, and another up towards the great house upon the crest of the rising ground, Tom Heron hurried away in the direction of Hownston. He hardly knew why his heart was filled with this sudden rush of emotion. Certainly the warning he had received seemed to point to the conclusion that the period of calm which he had enjoyed for some time past was to be broken in upon, and that some hostile and menacing movement was to be made; but that was not a matter greatly to disturb him. He had passed through many such crises in various places before. He had been with Nelson and others in scenes of violence and peril, and the result had always showed him that those who were doing the Lord's work were preserved by Him from any grievous bodily harm. Tom did not look to be miraculously preserved, but he did hold that it was his duty to go calmly upon his way, undeterred by any threat or violence that might be offered him. His duty was plain—to think of the cause first, and himself second. If peril came, he would meet it bravely, and strive to overcome it; but to be deterred from fulfilling any engagement he had made, just because he had received an anonymous warning, was a thing that never seriously entered his head. He had seen and heard enough of Mr. Wesley's cool intrepidity under similar circumstances to feel perfectly

resolved as to his own course. It might be even that the warning was but a ruse to try and scare him away from his post, and to let it be known then what manner of man the preacher was, who fled from his flock at the first hint of danger. Tom actually smiled to himself as he thought of this; and he tramped the long miles to Hownston in the hot sunshine of an early August morning, as steady and resolved as though that mysteriously worded missive in his pocket had no existence.

He preached to a large gathering of colliers that morning, dined with the foreman of the pit, and met one or two classes in the afternoon. It was afterwards remarked that the words spoken to each person that day were particularly apt and convincing; and he left the place escorted by a number of rough fellows, resolved to hear him again at the quarries.

The rich glow of an August sunset was lighting up the hill-side upon which the quarries were situated when Tom Heron stood forth before the large assembly gathered to hear him, and gave out his text, 'Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching.'

The preacher looked straight across the valley westward to the spot where the golden sun was sinking in gorgeous panoply of red and gold to its nightly rest. The ground fell away so rapidly that, without any sort of pulpit, he was raised above his hearers as effectually as if he occupied an artificially raised platform, and his powerful voice rang out over the heads of his audience in tones that were distinctly audible to every soul in the crowd.

Tom did not to-night play upon the terrors of his listeners. His talk was not of the fearful doom of the wicked, the torment and eternal misery of hell, the seething wickedness of this present world, and the headstrong way in which men were hurrying on to their doom.

No, to-night he took another theme—the blessedness of those who, watching in faith and steadfast hope for the

coming of their Lord, should be found with minds and hearts turned heavenwards, when the day should come for their Lord to call them to Himself, or should Himself return to them and bid them give an account of their stewardship.

Probably Tom had preached in his time many more thrilling sermons, but there was something in his whole look and manner as he spoke to his hearers to-night that held them spell-bound, and brought tears of feeling to many unaccustomed eyes. The effect produced upon the hearers of the word is doubtless greatly proportioned to the depth of feeling in the heart of the preacher ; and to-night Tom was speaking from his very heart, not declaiming, denouncing, driving men to repentance by sheer fear of the consequences and the hideousness of sin, but pleading, imploring, reasoning with them ; not threatening, not speaking to them as to impenitent sinners to be drawn to receive the atonement of the Cross, but as to brothers and fellow-labourers in the vineyard, who have accepted that atonement and become the servants of the Lord. These should be found by Him always abiding in their faith and love, true to themselves, and to the holy cause in which they have enrolled themselves, with minds and hearts fixed heavenwards, waiting and watching, and counting each day lost that does not bring them one step nearer to God—that has not brought them in some small degree nearer to the loving Saviour, whose gracious words to all are, ‘Come unto Me, I will give you rest.’

These words had just passed his lips—‘I will give you rest,’ and in the momentary pause made, his eyes had turned from his congregation towards the sunset sky, now one blaze of radiant glory. Some of the glory seemed to be reflected upon the face of the preacher ; many saw the strange look in his dark eyes, as though for him the heavens themselves had opened, as though he looked upon sights which from their eyes were hidden. A hush, a pause as of expectancy fell upon the assembled crowd, and then there rang out sharp and clear the report of a pistol.

A start—a smothered exclamation from a hundred tongues, and the whole crowd swayed and surged back and forward like the waves of a troubled sea; for Tom Heron, the preacher, two seconds after the report which had startled them all, threw up his arms in a sudden and spasmodic way, tottered forward a few steps, and then fell heavily face downwards, and lay still and motionless upon the ground.

A wild cry went up from the assembled crowd, and for a moment it seemed as if a spell of horror had fallen upon them. Then two strong men came dashing out from the panic-stricken crowd, and with them a young girl, who clung fast to the arm of one. The next moment Molly was holding Tom's head upon her lap, whilst Jos Dawson and Mike Portway bent over him, striving in their tender but unskilled fashion to discover the extent of the injury done him.

Tom's face was ashy pale, his half-closed eyes seemed to be glazing with the film of death. There was no great effusion of blood, but the bullet had struck him in the back, and what its course might be those about him could not even guess.

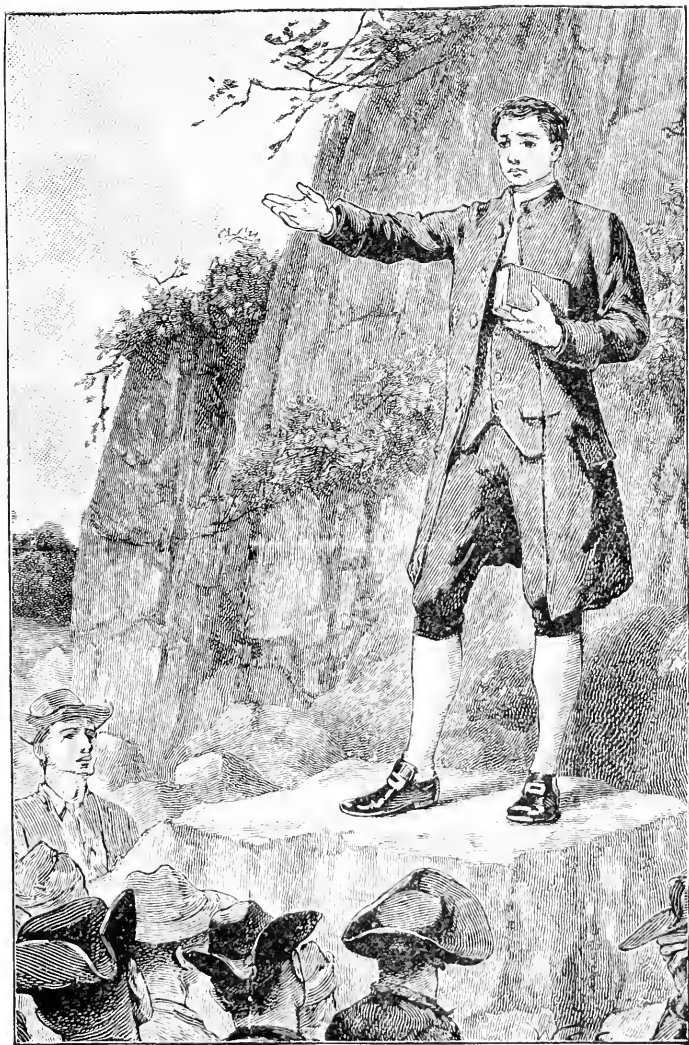
'Tom, Tom!' cried Molly, in a voice sharpened by terror and anguish. 'Oh, Jos, say that he is not dead!'

As the clear accents of the girl's voice fell upon the still air Tom's eyes suddenly unclosed, and he slightly raised his head and gazed about him.

'What is it?' he asked faintly; and then recollection appeared to come back to him, and he looked round him with a strange smile.

'Is that Molly there? So thee came to hear Tom preach his last sermon, lassie? Molly, I thought to have taken care of thee till we grew old together; but the Lord knows best. The lady of Ernscliff will not let thee want. My humble duty to her, and my blessing for all she has been to me and thee.'

These words fell cold upon the hearts of the listeners. Was Tom indeed stricken for death? Truly he looked like it, and he seemed to feel the approach of the last messenger.



None of those gathered about him tried to combat his conviction, for they believed only too well that he was fast passing away, and out there in that wild spot there was no help to be had.

'Tom,' said Jos, kneeling down beside his old comrade, 'thee need have no fear for Molly. She shall bide with the lady of Ernscliff or with mother till she is a bit older, and then she shall come to me. I will make a home for her. I will take care of her. I have never cared for anybody in the world but Molly, and I will make her a good husband when she is grown old enough to wed me. Thee can trust her to me, Tom Heron? I know the lassie will not say me nay.'

Tom smiled faintly, and for answer took hold of Molly's fingers and placed them in the horny hand of Jos Dawson, who held them fast, whilst Molly, divided betwixt choking sobs and a sense of loving dependence upon Jos, remained passive, clinging unconsciously to the strong hand held out to her in token of life-long service.

'There be only Molly to look to me,' said Tom faintly. 'God bless thee, Jos! I know thee'll make her a good husband some day. My love to mother. I wish I had been a better son to her, but we did better by each other at the end. God bless Sax, and all the folks there! I think His blessing has come upon them.'

'Tom, Tom, don't leave us—don't leave us! What shall we do without thee?'

This was the burden of the cry going up from hearts of the crowd now gathered about the little group upon that lofty plateau. Tom's heavy eyelids lifted themselves once more, and he raised his head with a last access of strength.

'God bless you, lads!' he said, in stronger accents than any in which he had yet spoken. 'God bless you all, and keep you faithful till we meet again. I'd like to feel that I would see every one of you out there in yon bright land. Will you all try to come thither in God's good time?'

'We will, we will—ay, that we will!' cried every man of

that assembly. The hoarse voices broken by emotion surged round Tom like the tumultuous beating of waves upon the shore. His eyes were fixed upon the flaming western sky, his lips were parted in a smile. The hue of his face was death-like, but beneath the ashen pallor there seemed to shine an unearthly radiance. His lips moved, and Molly bent her head to catch the whispered words,—

‘Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word! Come unto Me—I will give you rest. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’

That same evening, some two hours after sunset, the village of Sax became aware of some strange and unwonted commotion. The villagers heard the measured tread of hundreds of feet approaching along the road from the north—the measured tread as of a great army. Rushing out from their cottages, they beheld a strange sight—the whole population, as it seemed, of the quarry settlement, recruited by numbers of colliers and rustics from the outlying districts, all marching bare-headed at a slow and even pace four abreast, whilst in their midst was a number of their strongest fellows, who were carrying upon their shoulders some heavy burden borne upon a hurdle, and draped in a white sheet.

There could be no mistaking the nature of such a burden, and ere the long procession had reached the first cottage in the place all Sax knew that Tom Heron was dead, and that his body was lying cold and stiff beneath that white pall.

As the procession wound along the village street there was not a man or boy, and hardly a woman, who did not fall into rank, and follow the bearers as they steadily toiled along. A great awe fell upon the place; there were many tears, but no loud lamentations. One had been suddenly called away from them by a fearful summons, but, as they all whispered one to the other, ‘He was fit to go,’ and the tears shed were rather for those who had lost a friend and a brother, than for him who had been taken home in the midst of his work,

And thus it was that Tom Heron was brought home to Sax. By whose hand he had met his death was never known. In the consternation of the moment nobody had attempted to pursue the miscreant, who must have hidden in the wood ; and all after-search proved unavailing. Crimes and outrages were by no means rare in that, as in later times, and many murderers went unpunished, many dark mysteries remained unravelled.

There were whispers abroad—ugly sinister whispers—that if Tom Heron had never thwarted Captain Fortescue in his hoped-for abduction of Mrs. Mary Ernscliff, he would never have come to this violent end. Not that anybody believed the captain to be directly connected with the matter. He was away from England on active service abroad, and however furious he might have been at the time, he would hardly have stooped to anything so base as secret assassination. But there was a strong feeling that this deed might have been an act of vengeance on the part of some of the lawless men he had hired on that occasion, who had heard his threats of vengeance, and had also themselves suffered through Tom's prompt action, having missed the liberal reward promised to them should the ruse be successful, and the lady be entrapped into willing or unwilling wedlock. Mutterings had been heard from time to time in various quarters, and the note found upon Tom's person proved that the knowledge of a preconcerted scheme of attack had got wind in some quarter. But the mystery was never unravelled ; all was speculation and surmise. Tom was dead—nothing could give him back again. Sax mourned for him long and truly ; whilst those who knew him best felt that he would have rejoiced to know that none had suffered the penalty of the law on his account. He had been ready—even glad to go. Perchance another soul hurried into eternity with such a crime staining it might have been lost for ever. There was a strong feeling that things were better as they were, and that Tom would have been the first to say so.

His funeral was an event that was talked of for years. Hugh Fortescue had difficulty in getting through the solemn and touching service without faltering; his young wife stood very close to the open grave, with Molly's hand in hers, and together they placed upon the coffin a cross of pure white flowers before it was slowly lowered to its last resting-place, 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

In the churchyard of Sax there long stood a rather remarkable tombstone. It was not a slab, but a square pillar-like fragment of rock, roughly hewn into shape, and only chiselled smooth upon one side. The stone had come from the quarries in the hill-side not far away, and for long the story was told of how a Methodist preacher—a native of the village—had met his death whilst standing on that very stone to preach to the people of the lonely hamlet.

Upon the smooth face of the stone, which had been quarried out and brought down by the hands of the men who had heard that last sermon, was the following simple inscription, the words of which had been selected by his comrades in life,—

‘TOM HERON OF SAX,
SOLDIER AND SERVANT OF CHRIST,
CALLED HOME BY HIS CAPTAIN
ON THE TENTH DAY OF AUGUST, 1750;
AND, WHEN CALLED,
FOUND AT HIS POST.’



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